



Cornell University
Cornell Center for Animal Resources and Education

CARE562.01 Environmental Enrichment Program for Rabbits

The intent of this standard operating procedure (SOP) is to describe an appropriate environmental enrichment program for rabbits. This SOP is intended for investigators and anyone caring for rabbits. This procedure is approved by the Cornell Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and the Cornell Center for Animal Resources and Education (CARE). Any exemption must be approved by the IACUC prior to its application.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of environmental enrichment is to provide rabbits with the opportunity to fulfill and express basic non-injurious behavioral needs that are typical to the species. Meeting these behavioral needs by providing a biologically relevant environment (i.e., opportunity to hide, socialize, and forage) will optimize physiologic and psychological wellbeing thereby enhancing animal welfare.

2. Materials

- Forage material (e.g., hay,, mixed field greens).
- Hiding object (e.g., plastic bucket)
- Toys (e.g., small PVC pipe or plastic balls)

3. Procedures

- a. Social Environment

Note: Rabbits scare easily. Minimize noise and sudden movements adjacent to housing enclosures.

- i. Pair- or group-house female rabbits.
- ii. Check with CARE before group housing neutered males.

- iii. Rabbits may be singly housed in some cases:
 - 1. Incompatibility
 - 2. Specific protocol approved by IACUC.
 - 3. Medical reasons
 - 4. Unneutered male rabbits

Note: House individual animals in a manner that allows them to at least see, hear, or smell others.

- iv. Handle gently and frequently (e.g. petting, playing, gentle vocalization)..

b. Dietary Enrichment

- i. Provide autoclaved hay daily.
- ii. Occasionally (e.g., 3 times weekly, provide fresh fruits and vegetables. Consult with CARE and PI prior to giving dietary enrichment.

Note: Document all non-hay enrichment provided. Fruit and carrots are high in calories and should therefore not be routinely provided. Rinse vegetables thoroughly prior to use.

c. Objects

Note: Rabbits are prone to spontaneous vertebral fractures. Any large objects placed in the rabbit's environment must be either soft or light so as to reduce risk of rabbit injury.

- i. Provide shelters (e.g. plastic bucket or box) in all primary enclosures.
- ii. Inspect environmental objects daily for soiling with feces/urine and clean items if soiled.
- iii. Sanitize or replace environmental objects at least every 14 days.

4. Safety

When working with animals wear appropriate PPE, and be aware of allergy, zoonosis and injury risks. Refer to appropriate references below.

5. Contingencies

- a. Post contact information for emergency assistance in a conspicuous location within the animal facility.
- b. Emergency Veterinary care is available at all times including after working hours, weekends and holidays by CARE (pager 1-800-349-2456).

6. References

- Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. National Research Council; National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 1996.
- Enrichment Strategies for Laboratory Animals, ILAR Journal, Volume 46, Number 2, 2005. National Research Council.
- Making Lives Easier for Animals in Research Labs, Animal Welfare Institute, 2007.
- Comfortable Quarters for Laboratory Animals, Animal Welfare Institute, 2002
- Zoonosis : <http://www.research.cornell.edu/care/zoonoses.html>
- Allergens Prevention:
[http://www.research.cornell.edu//CARE/documents/OHS/AllergyPreventionFact Sheet.pdf](http://www.research.cornell.edu//CARE/documents/OHS/AllergyPreventionFactSheet.pdf)
- CARE 707 Animal Related Injury:
<http://www.research.cornell.edu/care/documents/SOPs/CARE707.pdf>
- CARE 715 Personal Protective Equipment:
<http://www.research.cornell.edu/care/documents/SOPs/CARE715.pdf>

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