

## Basic Care – Rabbits

- Rabbits are timid animals and panic easily.
- Active, curious animals that like to explore objects in their environment.
- Social, do well when group housed.
- Should be grouped together while they are young.
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
  - Jingle balls
  - J type food hoppers
  - Timothy hay blocks
  - Food treats
- Rabbits are mild tempered but when frightened or stressed, may attempt to bite or jump at the handler.
- May show aggression or fear by stomping the hind feet.
- Active at twilight and sleep through the day.
- Male is called a buck, female is called a doe.
- Should be fed commercially prepared pelleted diets that are balanced for proper nutrition and have high fiber content.
- Rabbits tend to overeat if fed ad libitum, they should be fed only measured amounts of feed.
- One of the first signs of illness is loss of appetite.
- Rabbits stop eating when deprived of water.
- A continuous supply of fresh, clean water should be provided using either water bottles with sipper tubes or an automatic watering system.
- Water bottles and feeders should be fastened securely to cages.
- Minimum cage or pen sizes are specified in USDA Animal Welfare Regulations and The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. Exceptions must be approved by the IACUC.
- Gentle but firm manual restraint will cause the rabbit to relax and stop struggling.
- To carry or transport a rabbit, grasp the scruff of the neck with one hand and support the hind quarters and back with the other. This will prevent the rabbit from kicking with its powerful hind legs. Tuck the head into the crook of the arm that is supporting the hind quarters.
- Rabbits should never be restrained by grabbing the ears.
- For more specific species information including physiologic data, husbandry and breeding requirements, or procedural information, please contact the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (865-974-5634).