

Restraint and Handling of Small Companion Mammals

Heather Darbo-McClellan, CVT, VTS (ECC)

LafeberVet R.A.C.E. provider # 776-11130

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I. Introduction

- A. Predator species
 - 1. Generally quite bold, e.g. Ferret
 - 2. Can be approached in a manner similar to that used for cats and dogs
- B. Many exotic companion mammals (ECM) are prey species
 - 1. Can become easily stressed in a hospital setting
 - 2. Approach these patients calmly, gently, quietly
 - 3. Minimize stress whenever possible
 - a. Gather or prepare all items that may be needed for exam or procedure
 - b. Visual exam before you lay hands on your patient
 - i. Observe the appearance and mentation
 - ii. Up to the stress manual restraint?

II. Chinchillas (*Chinchilla lanigera*)

- A. Capture
 - 1. Most pet chinchillas are used to being handled
 - 2. Relatively easy to capture and restrain
- B. Manual restraint
 - 1. Place one hand under the body
 - 2. The other hand gently grasps the tail base
 - 3. Brief video clip illustrating technique
- C. Cautions
 - 1. Fur slip
 - a. Warn client in advance
 - b. Uncommon
 - c. Never scruff or handle roughly
 - 2. Jumping

III. Guinea pigs (*Cavia porcellus*)

- A. Capture
 - 1. Calm, gentle animals
 - 3. Rarely bite
- B. Manual restraint
 - 1. Place one hand gently around the thorax
 - 2. The other hand supports the rump
- C. Cautions
 - 1. Bottom heavy

2. No scruffing

IV. Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

- A. Capture
 1. Usually very docile
 2. Rarely thump feet and nip
- B. Cautions
 3. Broken or dislocated back or leg
 - a. Lightweight, delicate skeleton
 - b. Well-developed back and leg muscles
- C. Manual restraint
 1. Non-slip surface
 - a. Large, heavy towel
 - b. Pad
 2. Light restraint
 3. 'Bunny burrito'
 4. Tuck against body like a football
 - a. Tuck head between side of body and arm
 - b. Use other arm to support rabbit's body against handler's body
 5. Returning safely to the cage: rear end first

V. Rats (*Rattus* spp.)

- A. Capture
 1. Most pet rats are good-natured, friendly
 2. Used to being handled
- B. Minimal restraint
- C. Manual restraint
 1. Technique 1
 - a. Thumb on one side of rat's head and index finger on other side
 - b. Support the body
 2. Technique 2
 - a. Forefinger just beneath jaw on one side of head
 - b. Thumb beneath opposite elbow, gently yet firmly pushing forelimb up towards rat's face
 3. Gently scruff if necessary
 4. Tail base can be gently grasped prn

VI. Gerbils

- A. Capture
 1. Typically docile
 2. Loosely cup in hands
 3. Thump feet +/- bite when threatened
- B. Manual restraint
 1. Grasp tail base in one hand
 2. Scruff loose skin along neck and back
- C. Tip of tail: risk of degloving injury

VII. Hamsters

- A. Capture
 - 1. More likely to bite when awakened from deep sleep
 - 2. If not startled, can be scooped into hands
 - 3. Do not tolerate excessive or prolonged handling
- B. Manual restraint
 - 1. Large amount of loose skin over neck, shoulders, back
 - 2. Scruff
 - a. Like a cat: grasp skin between thumb and fingertips
 - b. Full hand grip
 - i. Use all five fingers plus lower palm
 - ii. Support body with other hand

VIII. Mice (*Mus musculus*)

- A. Capture
 - 1. Very active, quick to jump away
 - 2. Avoid chasing around enclosure, scoop into small container like a cup instead
- B. Small, clear container for visual exam
- C. Manual restraint
 - 1. Large, amount loose skin around neck, shoulders, back
 - 2. Gently grasp tail base
 - 3. Scruff

IX. Hedgehogs (*Atelerix albiventris*)

- A. Spines can cause some discomfort in all but the tamest pets
 - 1. Towel, light leather gloves
 - 2. 'Puff up' as a defensive behavior while hissing and spitting
- B. Techniques to unroll the hedgehog have been described
 - 1. Work best on hand-tame pets
 - 2. General anesthesia is generally required for complete physical exam
 - 3. Subdued lighting in a quiet room can help put the conscious hedgehog at ease

X. Sugar gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*)

- A. Easy to handle but difficult to restrain
- B. Manual restraint
 - 1. Do not tolerate being scruffed
 - 2. Technique
 - a. Grasp the tail base while allowing the glider to hold onto a surface with its forefeet
 - b. Then place your thumb on one side of the glider's head and your index finger on the other side while still supporting the body
 - 3. Towel or light leather gloves

4. General anesthesia

XI. Ferrets (*Mustela putorius furo*)

- A. Capture
 1. Usually easily handled
 2. Rarely bite, exceptions:
 - a. Nursing females
 - b. Kits nip
- B. Minimal restraint
 1. Little petting
 2. Slow administration of high calorie paste to distract
- B. Manual restraint
 1. Necessary when obtaining a rectal temperature, giving injections, or during other uncomfortable procedure
 2. Scruff
 3. Stretch
 - a. Grasp over the pelvis and not the caudal abdomen
 - b. Do not hold the legs since most ferrets will struggle
 4. Review of brief video clip

XII. Restraint for common techniques

- A. Oral examination
- B. Oral medication
- C. Nutritional support
- D. Venipuncture
- E. IV catheter placement
- F. Face mask induction

XIII. Approach to less commonly seen species

- A. Degu (*Octodon degus*)
- B. Prairie dog (*Cynomys* spp.)
- C. Fennec fox (*Vulpes zerda*)

XIV. Conclusion

XV. References

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XVI. Resources

- www.LafeberVet.com
- www.ahwla.org.uk/site/tutorials/BVA/BVA02-Introduction.html
- www.brookfallsveterinary.com
- www.barbarasffat.com/small-mammal-training.html

XVI. Summary of key points