

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS

MICE AND RATS ARE THE ANIMALS MOST COMMONLY USED FOR EXPERIMENTS BECAUSE THEY ARE SMALL, CHEAP TO HOUSE AND EASY TO BREED



Vivisection, which is the practice of experimenting on live animals, is a hotly debated subject. Some people argue that animal experiments are essential for medical progress and for testing the safety of new products. Others say that, as well as being cruel to animals, they are also harmful to people. This is because the results from animal tests apply only to animals – humans often react very differently and so the animal results are misleading.

What happens in laboratories?

The government describes an animal experiment as a 'procedure' that is 'likely to cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm'. Many experiments cause extreme suffering, often to the point of the animal's death. Even when they are not being experimented on, animals suffer stress in laboratories where they are typically kept in barren containers or kennels. Some will be kept in solitary confinement, denied any company or comfort. After the animals have been used in experiments they are usually killed, although many will be used in ongoing experiments over a period of months, or even years.

How many animals are used?

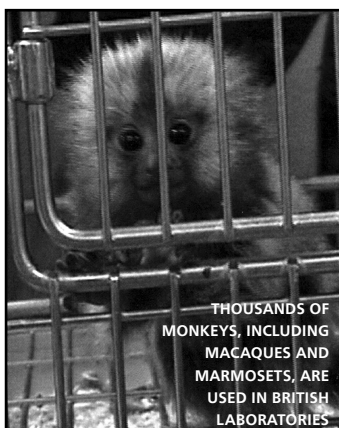
Each year inside British laboratories, approximately 3 million animals are experimented on. And this figure does not include 'wasted' animals – those bred so that bits of their bodies can be used in research; animals rejected because they weren't quite 'right'; or animals who were 'surplus' to requirements. If these were included in the annual statistics, the tally of animals used would probably increase by millions.

What types of animals are used?

Around 87% of animals used in laboratory experiments are mice and rats – because they are small, cheap to house and easy to breed.

Guinea pigs, rabbits, cats, dogs, primates (monkeys), birds, reptiles, pigs, sheep, cattle, chickens, horses and fish are also used.

When researchers say 'most of the animals we use are rats and mice', it is as though they want us to believe



THOUSANDS OF MONKEYS, INCLUDING MACAQUES AND MARMOSETS, ARE USED IN BRITISH LABORATORIES

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BEAGLES ARE THE MOST COMMONLY USED DOGS BECAUSE THEY ARE DOCILE, TRUSTING AND OBEDIENT



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these animals are disposable objects who cannot suffer. Rats and mice are intelligent, inquisitive animals. They possess strong maternal instincts, and experience pain and fear just like any other animal. They are used in horrific experiments to test pain levels and in toxicity tests, in which they are literally poisoned to death.

Medical research

Researchers say they need to use animals in medical experiments to find the causes of, and treatments for, human diseases.

Drug testing

New medicines intended for people are first tested on animals in an effort to find out if they cause harmful side effects. These are called safety, or toxicity, tests.

Disease research

Researchers try to recreate human illnesses in animals so that they can study them and, supposedly, find cures. Animals are infected with lethal viruses, given cancer, surgically mutilated and injected with toxic chemicals to induce or mimic the symptoms of human diseases.

To induce artificial strokes in rats, cats and monkeys, researchers block arteries in their brains. Monkeys are often deliberately brain damaged, supposedly to find cures for human diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Other animals are deliberately driven mad so that they can be used to study conditions such as depression and schizophrenia.



GM research

A growing number of genetically modified (GM) animals are being bred every year. These animals have genes added, removed or altered in an effort to mimic different

human diseases such as cystic fibrosis, diabetes and asthma. Some animals have been modified to be born with, or automatically develop, different types of cancer. However, even GM animals do not get the same disease symptoms or react to drugs in the same way as humans. (See our Genetic Engineering factsheet.)

Product safety tests

Every year, hundreds of thousands of animals are used in toxicity tests that are designed to assess the safety of agricultural and industrial chemicals, food additives, household cleaning products and cosmetics. These substances are rubbed into their skin, dripped into their eyes, forced down their stomachs, injected, or administered as a gas in a sealed chamber. Although animal testing for cosmetics has been banned in Britain, products that have been tested in other countries still fill our shops. (See our Cosmetics and Product Testing factsheet.)

Weapons research

Animals are maimed, shot, blown up and exposed to poisonous chemicals, gases, deadly toxins, viruses and bacteria in weapons tests.

Do animal experiments save lives?

Animal experiments give results that cannot reliably be applied to humans. Animals' bodies are different from ours. They don't get the same diseases that we do and they often have very different reactions to drugs and chemicals. The success rate for predicting harmful side effects from animal experiments is only 5 - 25%, which means we would be better off tossing a coin than relying on animal experiments.

A good example of how different species react to a chemical or medicine is penicillin, which is one of the most commonly used antibiotics today. Penicillin kills guinea pigs, yet it cures humans. Products such as aspirin and paracetamol, commonly used to treat people, are highly poisonous to cats. Aspirin causes birth defects in most laboratory animals, but not in humans, and chocolate is poisonous to dogs!

Many drugs, which were passed as safe in animal tests, have caused serious side effects, and even deaths, in people. In fact, 18,000 people die every year in the UK from the harmful side effects of prescription drugs.

In addition, none of the animal disease 'models' accurately mimic a sick human being, so relying on information obtained from them during experiments can be dangerously misleading.

What are the alternatives to animal experiments?

'In vitro' tests: Scientists can examine human cells or tissues in test tubes in order to study disease, test drugs and manufacture vaccines. Every human cell type can now be studied in vitro.

Computer models: These can be used to screen potential drugs at an early stage in their development.

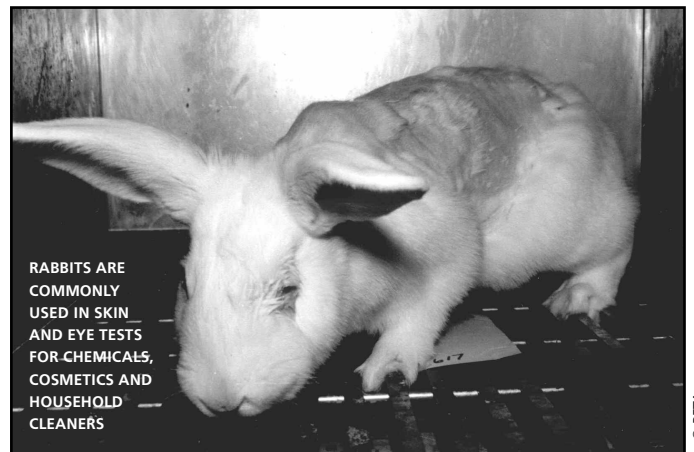
Clinical studies: These involve the monitoring of illnesses in human patients.

Epidemiology: This is the study and comparison of groups of people to learn what causes health problems.

Postmortem studies: Examining the bodies of people who have died can give clues about diseases and their causes.

Prevention: It makes sense to stop people getting ill in the first place. Educating people about healthy living could save many lives.

(For more info, see our factsheet on Humane Research.)



WHAT YOU CAN DO!

- Join the Animal Aid Youth Group and help to campaign against all animal experiments.
- Contact us for a free Animal Testing Info Pack.
- Find out more. Check out our website: www.animalaid.org.uk/youth
- Don't buy cosmetics, toiletries and household products that are tested on animals. Contact the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) for a copy of their cruelty-free list: www.buav.org
- Ask your teacher if someone from Animal Aid can come to your school to give a talk on animals in medical research.