Safety in Patient Confinement Area

Course 106
Module 3
Restraint of Exotic Animals
Rats

Remove a rat from its cage by grasping the base of the tail and lifting it onto the exam table. Grasp it around the rib cage, just under the forelimbs, but make sure you do not squeeze too tightly. It is fairly easy to cut off the rat's oxygen. Once you have it around the thorax you can get a better hold of the tail with the other hand and a second person can perform whatever procedure is required.

Mice

Pick up the mouse by the base of the tail, never by the tip. The skin on the tail can be pulled off. Put the mouse on a surface such as the top of the cage or on some wire mesh. Pull back slightly on the tail so that the mouse will grab ahold of the mesh. Then grab the scruff with your thumb and forefinger and turn your hand over so that the mouse's abdomen is facing up. You can then tuck the tail between your other fingers so you have additional control.
Gerbils

Restraining gerbils is slightly different than restraint used for mice. Grab it by the base of the tail and allow it to stand on your other palm. They can be held by their scruff but should not be lifted by the scruff. If additional restraint is needed, you can encircle the thoracic area with your thumb and forefinger. Avoid sudden movements or loud noises. Some gerbils are prone to seizures and excessive stimulation of the senses can cause a seizure to occur.
Hamsters & Guinea Pigs

- Hamsters can be picked up by cupping your hands around them or by scooping them into a paper cup
- Grasp the body with one hand and support the hindquarters with the other

Hamsters
Hamsters can be picked up either by cupping your hands around them or by scooping them into a paper cup. If you need to restrain, grasp as much skin possible over the shoulders. If you do not grasp enough skin, they can still turn around and bite.

Guinea Pigs
Grasp the body with one hand and support the hindquarters with the other. Guinea pigs tend to be docile creatures.
**Prairie Dogs**

The best way to restrain a prairie dog is to wrap it in a towel. They are typically obese and have extremely short necks so there really is not a place to grasp them. A leash and harness can be used. Watch out, they do bite!

**Chinchilla**

Restraining a chinchilla is similar to restraining a rabbit. Using one hand, grasp the base of the tail and hook your fingers around so that they are controlling the hind feet. Then place the other hand over the back so that you have control. Never hold them by the middle or tip of the tail. The tail skin can pull off as it does with some rodents.
Rabbits

When carrying a rabbit, you can scruff it by the back of the neck, but make sure your other hand has support of the hindquarters. Rabbits are sensitive and if they are frightened, they may try to escape by kicking out with their back feet. This can break their back. Never pick a rabbit up by its ears.

Ferrets

Minimal restraint should be used, but always keep in mind that they are quick, can twist and maneuver easily, and do have sharp teeth. Ferrets can be scruffed and it usually calms them down. If restraint of the back end is required, restrain at the hip region. Do not pull on their back feet, as this will make them nervous.
Pot-bellied Pigs

Never lift a pot-bellied pig by its back legs.

Hedgehogs

A frightened hedgehog will curl up into a prickly little ball. You need to wear gloves or use a towel or other material to wrap around it. Make sure you pick it up with a hand on each side, with one of them also supporting the abdomen.
Passerines

As with the psittacines, watch for the beak. Fortunately, these small birds do not have as much of a bite as the larger birds do. To catch a canary or finch, turn the lights off, then reach into the cage. The goal is to get your index finger on one side of the bird’s neck and your middle finger on the other side. Then you can hold the bird while it is lying on its back on your palm. Do not put any pressure on the thorax as it may suffocate.
Psittacines

When restraining these birds, you obviously need to avoid the beak and claws. Never wear gloves when dealing with them. The gloves make it more difficult for you to feel how much pressure you are using and you may be holding the bird too tightly. Dim the lights in the room, then place a towel over the bird’s head. Wrap the body in another towel and hold the bird close to you so that it cannot flap its wings. Then the towel can be removed from just the part the veterinarian needs to see. If it is trying to bite, you can give it a perch from its cage so that it has something to chew on besides you.
Iguana

When restraining an iguana, always have one hand holding it under the thorax, while the other hand is supporting the tail. If you are hit with the tail, it can cause whelps. Another restraining technique for iguanas is to hold the animal in a baseball grip over the top of the pectoral and pelvic region. Use your elbow to support the tail.
Snakes

To restrain a snake, get control of the head first. Grab it at the base of the head. If your clinic has the plexiglass tubes used for restraining snakes, you can guide the head to the opening of the tube. Ideally, the snake will crawl into the tube and then you can grab the snake at the tube entrance when he is far enough in. As with any animal, restraint is a process of learning through practice. Always ask for help until you are completely comfortable dealing with a particular type of animal. A good bit of advice from Dr. Dennis McCurnin's book is to make sure you wash your hands before attempting to handle a snake. If the previous patient you handled was a mouse or some other species that the snake considers food, you do not want to smell like it when handling the snake. Also, snakes can carry salmonella. You should always wash your hands between patients anyway, but this is another good reason why.
Turtles

Most turtles are fairly easy to handle, but some of them do bite. Use towels to cover the head so that the turtle cannot see, then you can grab the turtle by the back legs or the tail. You can also use the towel to assist in holding the head still.
Frogs

To properly handle frogs, you should be able to recognize the types your clinic sees regularly. The handling techniques are different depending on the type of frog. For some tree frogs, it is recommended that your hands be damp so that the frog can stick to you easier and you will be less likely to damage the skin. Frog skin can be extremely delicate. With some breeds, it is recommended to not touch them anymore than you have to because the skin is so delicate, even minor handling can do major damage.