

Furnishings and enrichment for laboratory animals

Environmental enrichment is often mentioned in discussions about the welfare of laboratory animals. In Sweden there are two concepts used to describe modifications to the housing environment – furnishings and enrichment. The two concepts are frequently used interchangeably. The Swedish National Committee for the Protection of Animals Used for Scientific Purposes wants to clarify the differences we believe exist between furnishings and enrichment.

Furnishings

Refers to resources in the enclosure that meet the animals' basic needs.

Enrichment

Refers to resources provided to the animals to offer stimulation beyond their basic needs.

What constitutes furnishings or enrichment varies between species

Each animal species has certain basic needs that must be met to prevent the animals from experiencing negative health and welfare. Such basic needs include food, water, and resting places, but they can also include other elements in the animals' environment such as hiding places and raised areas. If the basic needs are not met, animals may try to fulfil the unmet needs by exhibiting behaviours that are perceived as abnormal.¹ The National Committee considers resources that meet basic needs as furnishings. Enrichment, on the other hand, refers to resources that go beyond what is needed to satisfy the animal's life-sustaining and basic behavioural needs and provide them with extra stimulation.²

Examples of species specific furnishings

- Nesting material for mice.
- Raised area and the opportunity to dig for rabbits.
- Dust bath and perch for domestic hens.

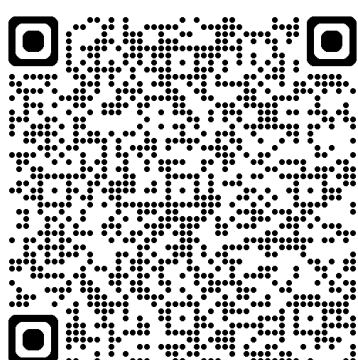


Examples of enrichment that are relevant for most species

- Foraging for food.
- Destroying/chewing on materials.
- Dynamic environments.
- Cognitive stimulation.



This poster summarises the Swedish National Committee's statement on furnishings and enrichment for laboratory animals. Read the statement here:



1. Polanco, A., Ahloy-Dallaire, J., and Díez-León, M. (2021). Abnormal Behavior. I: Sørensen, D. B., Cloutier, S., & Gaskill, B. N. (Eds.). Animalcentric Care and Management: Enhancing Refinement in Biomedical Research (s. 43–57). CRC Press.
2. Sveriges lantbruksuniversitets Vetenskapliga råd för djurskydds definitioner av centrala begrepp, Miljöberikning, <https://www.slu.se/centrumbildningar-ochprojekt/nationellt-centrum-for-djurvalfard/slus-vetenskapliga-rad-fordjurskydd/radets-defintioner/> (2025-03-21).