



# Chapter 008, Anatomy, Physiology, and Behavior (American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine)

*Mark Suckow*

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NOTE: This is a single chapter excerpted from the book *The Laboratory Rabbit, Guinea Pig, Hamster, and Other Rodents*, made available for individual purchase. Additional chapters, as well as the entire book, may be purchased separately.

The rabbit is a popular model in laboratory animal medicine due to its relatively large size and docile nature. Though rabbits are sometimes mistakenly thought of as rodents, they are in their own Order, Lagomorpha. Among the many breeds of rabbits, by far the most popular in research is the New Zealand White rabbit. Research in these rabbits has contributed to advances in cardiology, orthopedics, dentistry, immunology, and more. This chapter outlines the anatomy and physiology of rabbits. Rabbits have thin, delicate skin that is generously covered with both underfur and guard hairs. The rabbit's skin, similar to the rat's, has blood vessels immediately under the dermis. Unlike the rat, however, the fascia superficialis is well differentiated due to the elastic fibers and dense collagen content. Hair grows in waves starting from the ventrum and grows dorsally and caudally. Thick fur covers the feet in place of footpads. The fragile skin can tear easily and must be handled carefully during any manipulation. Rabbits are social, nocturnal animals that, despite over 2000 years of domestication, still have a highly developed prey instinct.

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