Denver | Anschutz

IACUC
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Subject:	**Food and Water Deviations**
Source	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)
Effective Date	08/10/2026
Replaces:	07/10/2023
Applies to:	Personnel involved in Research or Teaching involving animals.
Reference:	Animal Welfare Act; PHS Policy on Humane Care & Use of Laboratory Animals. Guide for the Care & Use of Laboratory Animals

Introduction

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) provides oversight of the institution's animal care and use program, ensuring compliance with federally mandated regulations, ethical standards, and institutional policies governing the humane use of animals in research and teaching at the University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz. The IACUC evaluates and reviews all activities related to the care and use of animals and determines if the proposed activities are in accordance with regulations.

Policy Statement

This policy provides information on the requirements for food and water restrictions and establishes procedures to be followed when restricting food and/or water. Standard housing of most laboratory animals provides *ad libitum* access to food and water.

Food/Water Restriction

Food or water restriction of any duration for research purposes needs to be scientifically justified and approved in the IACUC protocol. If the restrictions meet the definitions below, physiologic or behavioral parameters must be monitored, including criteria for ending the restriction regimen if adverse outcomes occur, such as weight loss or dehydration. Animals meeting those parameters should be returned to *ad libitum* access to food and water. In the case of conditioned-response experiments, the use of a highly preferred food or fluid as a positive reinforcement, rather than restriction, is recommended and preferred by the IACUC. Each protocol proposing food or water restriction will be considered and reviewed by the IACUC on a case-by-case basis.

Water restriction is defined as the discontinuation of *ad libitum* access to water for longer than 12 hours. It encompasses total deprivation and regimented access to water.

- It should be noted that rodents, especially mice, can become dehydrated very quickly.
- In rodents, food consumption is known to decrease with water restriction.

Food restriction is defined as the discontinuation of *ad libitum* access to food for longer than 24 hours for simple stomach animals, or longer than 48 hours for ruminants. It encompasses total deprivation and regimented access to food.

- It should be noted that rodents, especially mice, have a very high metabolism and fast gastrointestinal transit time. Therefore, they can be affected very quickly and significantly by food restriction.

Food/Water Restriction Information and Notification

- Animals under restriction should generally be singly housed to prevent aggression or cannibalism, unless the IACUC explicitly approves group-housing with a validated method to ensure equal consumption.
- Physiologically, rodents are not able to vomit and therefore would not benefit from food or water restriction prior to surgery like many larger animals. Food and water restriction should therefore be reserved for specific scientific purposes.

- Daily monitoring by Lab Staff: Animals under a food or water restriction regimen must be monitored daily for signs of morbidity (abnormal posture, rough hair coat, difficulty ambulating)
- Written records MUST be maintained and kept near the animal to document daily food or water consumption.
    - OLAR flags MUST be utilized to inform staff of restrictions.
        - The back of these flags can be utilized to document daily consumption
        - The card should include a lab contact and phone number (not the lab phone) so OLAR personnel can reach lab staff in case of an emergency.
- Precautions that MUST be used in cases of food or water restriction include:
    - Recording of body weight at least three times per week for adult animals, and daily for juvenile rodents or during restriction phases
    - Animals must be removed from the restriction regimen if body weight drops below 15% of pre-restriction weight (or growth curve baseline) unless a different threshold is scientifically justified and approved by the IACUC.
    - Behavior/clinical changes used as criteria for removal from the restriction regimen.

Food/Water Removal Notification

It is required that **any** food or water removal must be marked with standardized OLAR flags, as OLAR staff must know the status of the animals' food/water regardless of the IACUC definition of restriction as defined above.

- OLAR flags MUST be utilized to inform OLAR and other research staff of food/water removal for any reason unless research staff are in the immediate area.
- The OLAR flag should include a lab contact and phone number (not the lab phone) so OLAR personnel can reach the lab staff in case of an emergency.
    - For short-term research staff absence, the time staff will return should be included.
- The OLAR flag should include the time of food and/or water removal (or last time food/water was provided), duration of removal, and when food and/or water will be replaced

Compliance and Accountability

In accordance with regulatory requirements, failure to comply with this policy will result in a review by the IACUC. Depending on the severity of the violation, you may be required to complete additional training, and your privileges to conduct animal research at CU Denver | Anschutz may be suspended or completely revoked.

If your research privileges are suspended, your funding agency (e.g., NIH) and relevant regulatory agencies (e.g., USDA) may be informed about your violation of federal and/or local policies regarding the humane use of animals. This notification will have a direct impact on your ongoing funding for animal-related research.