# Rat Tickling Basics

## What is rat tickling?
Rat tickling is a handling technique that was developed to study play and positive affect.

It mimics rat rough-and-tumble play by using a human hand to playfully “wrestle” a rat.

## Why tickle rats?
- Improves rat positive affect, handling, & welfare.
- Reduces handling time, stress, fear & anxiety.
- More effective than other techniques.
- Social enrichment, especially for isolated rats.

## How to tickle a rat

Bring the home cage to a surface and remove hard enrichment items. Begin with your hand resting in the cage for a few seconds before starting the procedure below.

### 1. Dorsal Contact
- Use one hand.
- Tickle on nape of the neck.
- Light/brisk movements.

### 2. Flip
- Lift/turn using your thumb and middle finger under the shoulders & flick your wrist.
- Hold loosely, but firmly.
- Don’t kink the tail.

### 3. Pin
- Hold rat down loosely.
- Move fingers quickly & vigorously w/ light pressure.
- 2-4 seconds per pin.
- 4-5 pins for 15 seconds.

## Positive Responses
- Approach & follow your hand.
- Light nibbling at the fingers.
- Relaxed bodies and tails.
- 50-kHz vocalizations (use a bat detector).

## Negative Responses
- Avoidance & running away.
- Defensive postures.
- Tense bodies and tails.
- 22-kHz vocalizations (use a bat detector).

## What NOT TO DO
- Be too hesitant/slow/gentle.
- Be too rough.
- Contact the rump, (aggression is directed here).

For more information see: [LaFollette et al. 2017. Rat Tickling: A Systematic Review. PLOS ONE](http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0171461)

To see a video of tickling go to: [LabAnimalWelfare.com](http://www.labanimalwelfare.com)