

Answering specific questions

Here are some suggested answers to commonly asked questions:

? Why is it necessary to test on animals?

- 'The best hopes to cure malaria, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy and infertility, all rely on current animal research.'
- 'Around half the diseases in the world have no treatment. We need to give people and families living with disease some hope.'
- 'Many medical advances, from antibiotics to transplant surgery, have been made possible by animal research.'
- 'It's not just about drugs for humans – many of the drugs developed on animals are actually used for animals.'
- 'We cannot endanger human life with untested drugs. We need to be sure that our medicines are as safe as possible, so it is a legal requirement to test them on animals.'

? Isn't it cruel?

- 'The regulations governing all animal research in the UK are widely regarded as the strictest in the world and ensure that all animal research is conducted as humanely as possible.'
- 'Sometimes when we are studying a painful and serious disease, the animal will get the same symptoms as a human would. But compared to human suffering isn't this a reasonable balance?'
- 'It is standard practice to use a painkiller or anaesthetic to limit any suffering.'

? On incidents of malpractice:

- 'We do not condone malpractice because it is cruel, and bad science.'
- 'Deliberate cruelty is absolutely forbidden. Anyone found doing this is likely to be prosecuted, lose their licence and might never be allowed to do research again.'

? And on putting animals down:

- 'The vast majority of animals used in experiments will eventually be put down. This is normally so that we can do an autopsy and discover as much information as possible from studying the tissue.'

? Aren't there alternatives to using animals?

[Note: some people prefer to say 'other' or 'non-animal' techniques rather than alternatives]

- 'Scientific advances have resulted in the use of animals in research halving over the last 30 years. And money is being ploughed into finding new non-animal methods. However, in some cases there is no other alternative but to use animals.'

'Finding cures for diseases can take many years of painstaking work. Most is carried out in a laboratory with computers, in test tubes or on patients. But at some stages in research there is no alternative to using animals.'

'A computer hasn't yet been invented that can reproduce the complex interactions in the human body.'

'We can't yet reproduce a beating heart or a nervous system in a test tube.'

'The law says that if there is an alternative then you have to use it, and we do.'

'It is extremely expensive to use animals – we only use them when it is strictly necessary.'

'Using animals when you didn't have to would not only be bad science but bad business.'

? Aren't animals different to humans?

'An animal's biology is very similar to a human's. Even mice share over 90% of their genes with humans, and most of their basic chemistry is the same.'

'Animals share many similar diseases with humans, and research has helped animals too. More than half of the drugs used by vets were developed for human medicine.'

'A laboratory rat has the same organs as a human, in the same places, doing the same things.'

'Animals can get the same diseases as humans. For example horses can get lung disease, dogs can get diabetes or arthritis.'

'Studying diseases in animals provides powerful clues about what is happening in the human body.'

? On the use of cats, dogs and primates:

'Very few of these animals are used, and they are only used when a disease cannot be replicated in a mouse.'

'Dogs, cats and primates make up less than 1% of the research done using animals.'

'Research on the great apes (chimpanzee etc) is not allowed in the UK.'

? On drug side-effects being the fault of animal testing:

'Animals are used to make sure that new drugs are safe enough to test on humans. All new medicines are then tested on humans, which is where we pick up the potential side-effects.'

? What medical advances have we gained from animal experimentation?

'Anybody who has ever had any medical treatment is taking advantage of animal research. Most modern medicine and surgery exists because of animal research.'

'Imagine having bypass surgery before it had been tested out on an animal.'

'Insulin for diabetes, the polio vaccine, coronary surgery, antibiotics and in fact nearly every medical treatment that exists has been made possible by animal testing.'

? Don't animals have rights too?

- 'Our society has chosen not to give animals legal rights.'
- 'We have a responsibility towards animals, but we also have a responsibility towards humans. However, I'd put the human first.'
- 'There are some people who would argue that a rat has the same rights as a person. In my view a person is far more important.'

? Why is there so much secrecy?

- 'There are 2000 inspections a year, most of which are unannounced. This means that every hour of every working day someone is being inspected.'
- 'Unfortunately, criminal activity by animal rights extremists has caused a massive increase in the security around these sites – this is for the protection of our staff and animals.'
- 'People are afraid of talking about animal research because they fear violent activity by animal rights extremists, but despite this we are striving to be more open.'

? Why are we using GM animals?

[Note: In the last 20 years the overall numbers of animals being used in research has fallen, but the recent small increases are now due to more genetically modified animals being used]

- 'By using modern genetics we can now use animals to mimic diseases even more closely and really get to the heart of certain diseases.'
- 'It is now possible to insert human genes into mice to create an even better model of an illness such as cystic fibrosis and bring us one step closer to a cure.'

? What would happen if we banned animals testing tomorrow?

- 'Medical research would slow down and perhaps eventually grind to a halt'
- 'Research using animals would continue in the countries which have less strict rules than the UK.'

when animal research hits the headlines

a guide for your news interview

This is a guide for scientists and doctors preparing for a news interview where questions may be asked about the use of animals in medical research.

It was born out of a meeting between top scientists and journalists to discuss effective ways of answering the most commonly asked questions about animal research in the context of a short news interview.

This guide could be used in preparation for an interview or for media training. Other guides available from the SMC include *Communicating Risk in a Soundbite*, and *Peer Review in a Nutshell*.

"There is a growing confidence within the scientific community in talking to the media about the use of animals in medical research. This guide aims to encourage scientists to have a more open dialogue with the media. This will foster greater public confidence in the role of animal research and the high standards in UK research centres."

Sir George Radda
Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council

For more details, contact the Science Media Centre:
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This guide was compiled with advice from Research Defence Society and Association of Medical Research Charities

General advice for your interview

Your strongest point

If you only have time to make one point in your interview, then emphasise WHY animals are used in medical research.

e.g. we are using these mice to investigate possible treatments for cystic fibrosis.

A second point

If you've got a bit more time then talk about animal welfare. The public are highly concerned with this. All animal research in this country is carried out with a commitment to the three R's (Reduction, Refinement, Replacement) which means: using the minimum number of animals, with the highest animal welfare, and always using non-animal techniques where possible.

General interview technique

Plan how you would like the interview to go and what points you would like to make.

Get your message out irrespective of the line of questioning. Remember that the most important people are those listening to your interview, not your interviewer. Try not to get sidetracked: avoid diversions into fox hunting, vegetarianism. Remember that cosmetic testing has been banned in the UK since 1998.

Facts and figures

Have some information handy: some punchy facts and figures can be very effective. On the back page you can find links to resources that have up to date information about animal research in the UK such as: the number and type of animals used in research each year, Home Office licensing arrangements and regulations, lists of research areas that have benefited from animal research, other uses and statistics for animals used in society (e.g. we eat an average of 6 cows and 500 chickens in our lifetime).

Statistics

Numbers can be tricky, so try to present statistics in a form that your audience will be able to understand.

e.g. Over each UK citizen's lifetime, an average of 3 mice and 1 rat will be used for research.

Jargon

Use clear and simple language – if you have to use jargon, explain what you mean.

e.g. talk about heart disease not cardiovascular disease.

e.g. an animal model is where a scientist can mimic some aspect of a disease in an animal.

Diseases

When you are talking about disease, try to use examples that people know. For example: asthma, meningitis, Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis etc. Have some information about the disease: try painting a picture of the disease (e.g. a lifetime of injections for a diabetes sufferer), or use some figures (e.g. cystic fibrosis affects more than 7500 babies, children and young adults in the UK.).

Using personal examples

It can be effective to use a personal example when talking about animal research.

e.g. 'when I last treated a child with meningitis.'

e.g. 'when my friend/relative was diagnosed with cancer.'

How does animal research affect you?

Try to get people to think about how animal research affects them, their families and their friends.

e.g. 'would you refuse a life saving treatment because it had been tested on animals?'

Personal questions

Be as open as possible – honesty really does pay off. If you are asked in specific terms about what experiments you do, talk about this, but try to emphasise *why* you are doing this research and what diseases it could help us to understand.

e.g. 'looking at how nerve cells communicate with each other in animals can help us understand how diseases like Alzheimer's occur.'

Where to go for more information

Research Defence Society: The RDS has a section called 'facts at a glance', containing information about the numbers and types of animals used in research, medical benefits and research regulation:
www.rds-online.org.uk

Home Office: The Home Office has a page on animals in scientific procedures with links to information about regulation:
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/animals/index.html

Biomedical Research Education Trust: As well as information about numbers and types of animals used in research, BRET has a section on the use of animals in society:
www.bret.org.uk/soc.htm

Seriously Ill for Medical Research: SIMR has an interesting link to how animal research has underpinned the work of Nobel Prize laureates:
www.simr.org.uk/pages/nobel/nobel_survey.html

Association of Medical Research Charities: For information about specific diseases, the AMRC website has a page with links to all of its research charity members:
www.amrc.org.uk/amrlinks/index.html