

OUR VIEW ON ANIMAL TESTING

While alternative research methods exist, animal experiments remain necessary in VIB's biomedical research. VIB researchers primarily use mice, but also rats, tadpoles, and zebrafish. These animals are used in research on inflammatory diseases, cancer, cardiovascular, and neurobiological disorders. The decision to use animals is not taken lightly. The benefits of the experiment are always carefully weighed against the potential harm to the well-being of the animal. VIB researchers also strictly adhere to their ethical and legal duty:

- to replace animal experiments with alternative methods wherever possible,
- to reduce the number of experimental animals to the absolute minimum,
- and to refine the experiments to limit pain, discomfort, and stress in animals as much as possible (the 3 Rs).

Furthermore, VIB researchers have been working for years on the development of new technologies that can help reduce animal testing. Think of nanobody technology and a microfluidic model in which nerve endings can be studied.

In consultation with the Flemish government, VIB is taking additional actions to support further reduction of the number of animal experiments. These include:

1. **Additional training**
This is necessary because VIB continuously attracts people from all over the world, with different cultures and habits. VIB wants to make even more efforts to bring all these people to the same level of knowledge, commitment, and effort.
2. **Developing and using organoids on a broader scale**
Organoids are small three-dimensional tissues that have characteristics that are also expressed in a complete organ. Organoids have been developed some time ago, but the technology has now reached a stage where it is possible to apply such cultures more widely, and that's what VIB researchers are going to do.

While many efforts are made to reduce the number of animal experiments, they remain necessary to better understand complex diseases such as cancer, dementia, and inflammatory diseases, and to search for possible treatments.

Cell cultures and other non-animal methods are valuable but fall short in studying complex processes such as infections, metastasis, pain responses, movement, or memory. In many cases, it is also not possible to conduct experiments on humans. Animal models also have their limitations, but animals exhibit anatomical, physiological, and genetic similarities to humans. The use of animals helps us understand a part of these complex processes, thereby expanding our knowledge and developing new diagnostic methods and treatments for patients.

Phasing out or banning animal experiments would mean that as a society, we cannot seek answers for millions of patients worldwide.