

## **Multiple Benefits of Nutritional Enrichment**

Connie Kliwinski MLAS, LATg, SRS

Assessment of post-operative pain and locomotor ability can be a time-consuming and subjective process depending upon the species, study size, and procedure being evaluated. In an effort to address this issue, I began to offer nutritional enrichment to rats involved in an osteoarthritis protocol. The animals would come to the front of the cage to retrieve the treats which allowed observation of their ability to walk and stand erect and permit evaluation of their incision(s) without removing them from their cages. Providing the treats immediately after surgery afforded additional benefits related to decreased pica behavior, distraction away from the incision site, and additional sustenance to combat an initial weight loss often realized post-surgery. Rats were typically interested in the treats, therefore those that did not make their way to the front of the cage to retrieve them were assumed to be experiencing some difficulties, requiring further examination. The technique is simple and quick, providing an easy and efficient method to aid in post-operative assessments making the experience more palatable for both the study animals as well as the personnel involved.