



Exotic Animal Hospital

of Philadelphia

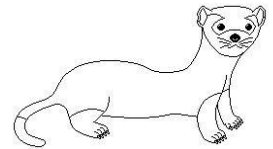
FERRETS

You got a new ferret? Congratulations!

Please refer to this handout in helping you setting your new ferret up for success as most of the diseases and emergency presentations to the veterinary hospital stem from improper husbandry and could be avoided.

Did you know?

- The wild ferret is a strict carnivore eating rodents and rabbits.
- They have a short intestinal tract and teeth that are designed to eat meat and bones.
- Ferrets are very social animals and generally do well as a couple or larger group.
- In the wild, ferrets dive into small prairie dog and rabbit burrows - therefore in captivity they are good at finding small holes to bury themselves in and are notorious for being able to escape from their cages
- You can infect your ferret with the flu!



What should they eat?

- Ferrets need to be fed a strictly carnivorous diet in the form of a high quality dry kibble. It is very important that ferrets get a high amount of fat (15-20%) and protein (30-40%) and little to no carbohydrates.
 - Kibbles with the highest meat based proteins are best, the first three ingredients should be meat based and can include chicken, beef, venison, turkey, lamb, duck, and rabbit.
- There are a variety of ferret diets available, such as Zupreem and Marshall Farms, or a high-quality kitten food can be used. Ferrets should have food available at all times.
- Ferrets should **NEVER** be given fruit, raisins or other high sugar foods - this is bad for their teeth and their digestive system.

WATER:

- Ferrets should always have access to fresh water from a water bottle or a large bowl.
- It is preferable to use a water bottle because ferrets are very good at tipping over water dishes which make a big mess!

ENCLOSURE:

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- Ferrets are very sneaky animals and they can fit through even the smallest holes. Therefore, it is important to keep your ferret in a cage when you are not home.
- The cage should be a few levels so that the ferret can climb.
- The floor of the cage and of the levels should be flat plastic NOT metal or mesh.
 - Ferrets can get their feet and legs caught in metal and/or mesh. Additionally, the urine of ferrets is acidic and will cause the metal cage to rust and disintegrate.
- In the cage, ferrets should have at least one or two cloth hammocks to sleep in.
- Ferrets generally urinate and defecate in corners. Therefore you can place a short-sided litter pan in the corner of the cage that the ferret prefers to use as the toilet. Shredded paper towels or newspaper can be placed into the litter box as a substrate. Additionally, recycled newspaper products can also be used.
 - Some sources recommend regular clay kitty litter, but this can result in excess dust and nasal irritation. Additionally, caution must be used as some ferrets will eat the clay litter.

ENVIRONMENT:

- Ferrets in captivity love to chew and swallow anything that is rubber or foam (shoes, erasers, ear plugs, rubber bands, foam balls, electrical tape, etc.). Therefore it is very important that ferrets are only allowed to play in areas that are free of all rubber and foam material.
- Gastrointestinal foreign bodies are common in ferrets and are easily preventable by ensuring that their play area is safe for them.
- Ferrets love to nibble on shoes, socks and bare toes, so it is easy to accidentally step on your ferret. Therefore always take care when walking in a room with your ferret.
- Ferrets are good at getting under couches and reclining chairs and can get accidentally crushed.
 - Therefore, it is best to allow your ferret to play in an area that doesn't have any furniture that your ferret can get under.

Interaction with other animals:

- Ferrets enjoy playing with household dogs and cats, but they should **ALWAYS** play with these animals under direct supervision.
- It only takes a minute for a dog or cat to inflict severe trauma to a playful ferret.

VACCINATIONS:

- We recommend that ferrets receive vaccinations at 9-12-15 weeks or 10-13-16 weeks for distemper. Rabies vaccination may be given between 12 and 16 weeks of age
- As adults, it is generally recommended that ferrets receive annual vaccinations against Canine Distemper Virus and Rabies.
- Vaccine reactions can occur in ferrets and specific vaccine protocols should be discussed with your veterinarian.

HEALTH:

1. Infectious ferret diarrhea:

- a. Ferrets can contract a form of diarrhea from other ferrets.
 - i. Isolate all new ferrets in the house for at least 4-6 weeks before introduction to your other ferrets.
 - b. This type of diarrhea is highly contagious and can even be given to your ferret if you play with other ferrets and then play with your own.
 - i. Change your clothes and wash your hands very well after playing with other ferrets or visiting them at pet shops, ferret shows, etc.
 - c. Signs of this infectious diarrhea include: diarrhea (can be greenish in color or even bloody or black if severe), lethargy, loss of appetite and dehydration.
- 2. Gastrointestinal foreign bodies:**
- a. As discussed above, these are very common in ferrets.
 - b. Signs of a foreign body include: diarrhea, loss of appetite, belly pain, grinding teeth and occasionally vomiting. Unlike in other species, vomiting rarely happens when ferrets have foreign bodies.
- 3. Insulinoma:**
- a. This disease is caused by having too much of a hormone (insulin) from the pancreas. This is the opposite of diabetes. When this hormone gets too high, it causes the blood sugar level to get too low.
 - b. When this happens, the ferret can act very sleepy, may fall over, may drool a lot and may paw at his/her face. In severe cases, ferrets may have seizures.
 - c. If you notice any of these signs, you can feed your ferret (if it is not having a seizure) or put honey on the ferret's gums - taking care not to place your fingers into the ferret's mouth.
 - d. This condition is manageable but rarely curable- please consult your exotics veterinarian with medical management options
- 4. Adrenal gland disease:**
- a. This disease is caused by too many hormones (sex androgens) from the adrenal glands.
 - b. When these hormones get too high they can cause the ferret to be itchy, lose its fur, have a swollen vulva (in females) and have a swollen prostate (in males).
 - c. When ferrets have a swollen prostate, they can have trouble passing urine - **this is an emergency** and ferrets can die from this.
 - d. If you notice your ferret having trouble passing urine, passing bloody urine, dribbling urine or straining to pass feces please contact your veterinarian immediately.
 - e. If you notice that your ferret is losing its hair, is itching or has a swollen vulva, you should also contact your veterinarian although it is not an emergency.
 - f. This condition is manageable but rarely curable- please consult your exotics veterinarian with medical management options
 - g. **We recommend that any ferret over the age of 6 months receives a deslorelin implant every 6-12 months to prevent adrenal disease**

TOP 10 reason to bring your ferret to the vet:

Seizure activity

Severe lethargy
Trouble passing urine or defecating
Traumatic injury like wounds or fractures
Sneezing/coughing/nasal discharge
Diarrhea (especially if bloody/green)
Itchy ears/shaking head
Inappetance/anorexia
Swollen glands
Fur loss on the tail and hind legs

