



# FERRETS

Ferrets are curious, good-natured animals that make wonderful pets. They are usually quiet, but alternate with periods of play and activity that can be quite comical at times! It is important to understand that they are *not* just small dogs or cats, though. They have unique requirements for their care that many new owners are not aware of. Your ferret veterinarian will discuss how to properly care for your new pet and keep him or her healthy and happy!

## WHAT DO I FEED MY FERRET?

Proper nutrition is an important aspect of your ferret's health. Ferrets are strict carnivores that require a diet that contains 30-40% meat-based protein, 18-30% fat, and limited amounts of carbohydrates and fiber. A diet specifically formulated for ferrets is preferred. High quality kitten foods may be used if ferret diets are not readily accessible. Dog food should never be fed.

Small amounts of fruit and vegetables can be used as treats, but do not exceed 1 tsp per day of these foods. Avoid sugary treats, dairy products, and diets with high levels of vegetable proteins.

Ferrets have a very high metabolic rate and should have food available at all times. Never withhold food from a ferret for more than 3 hours, as life-threatening low blood sugar can occur.

Finally fresh water provided daily in either water bottles or sturdy crocks is essential. If using water bottles, make sure the sipper tubes do not become clogged. Remember to wash your dishes and water bottles at least weekly.

## WHERE SHOULD I KEEP MY FERRET?

You should *always* keep your ferret in a cage or small ferret-proofed room when he or she is not supervised. Wire cages provide more ventilation than solid structures. The cage floor should be solid or covered with bedding. A multi-level cage is ideal and should contain cage furniture such as hammocks, tubing, and fabric for burrowing. Ferrets should also have access to a *litter box*. Your cage should be cleaned regularly.

*Exercise* is very important and should be allowed daily if possible. Your ferret should be supervised at all times when outside of his or her cage. Ferrets are inquisitive and can fit into small spaces. They are also fond of swallowing foam or rubber objects, often necessitating a trip to your veterinarian and ultimately a costly surgery!

Ferrets can easily be trained to accept a harness and leash. Most ferrets enjoy walks and spending supervised time outside.

As with all animals, prevent access to electrical cords, frayed fabric or loose carpet that could be ingested, lead paint, houseplants, pesticides or cleaning products, tobacco and cigarette smoke, and unsupervised dogs, cats, or birds.

## DO I HAVE TO SPAY OR NEUTER MY FERRET?

The majority of ferrets in the United States come from a small number of breeders. They are typically spayed or neutered and descented at 5-6 weeks old. Even though they are descented, it is important to know that ferrets still have a musky odor produced by glands in their skin. Regular bathing will help reduce this odor.

## VETERINARY CARE

Your ferret should be kept up-to-date on *canine distemper* and *rabies* vaccinations. A series of vaccines is required initially (usually 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age), then annually thereafter. Ferrets have a high rate of vaccination reactions, so it is important that you visit a veterinarian that is knowledgeable about ferrets. We recommend pre-medicating your ferret prior to vaccinations to decrease this risk.

Young ferrets should have a *fecal exam* performed to check for parasites. Monthly *heartworm* and *flea preventatives* are also important.

Ferrets over 3 years of age should have a physical examination performed every 6-12 months. There are numerous diseases such as adrenal disease, insulinoma, heart disease, and lymphoma that affect ferrets in this age group. Your veterinarian may recommend routine blood work, urinalysis, x-rays, or ultrasound.

Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of the following:

Poor appetite	Abnormal stools	Vomiting or gagging
Bad breath	Tooth grinding	Difficulty eating
Lumps	Dandruff or flaky skin	Itchiness or hair loss
Crusts or wax in ears	Bleeding	Difficulty breathing
Sneezing or coughing	Discharge from nose/eyes	Swollen vulva
Weakness	Difficulty walking	Listlessness
Difficulty urinating	Painful abdomen	Loss of back 'hump'

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Average life span: 5-8 years.
- They are in the *Mustelidae* family, along with skunks!
- Ferrets can get *influenza* from humans and vice versa.
- Male ferrets are called *hobs* and females are called *jills*. Baby ferrets are called *kits*.
- Ferrets are illegal in some locations. Check with your city.