

Home Care for Pet Ferrets

Food and Water

- Ferrets are obligate carnivores and require a high protein, low carbohydrate diet. Dry food should be always available.
 - Kibble brand recommendations include: Marshall, Mazuri
 - Crude protein should be 30-35% and fat content should be 15-20%
- Avoid treats that are high in sugar (e.g. commercial treats, yogurt drops).
 - Appropriate treats: small pieces of cooked unsalted meat, meat-based baby food, high quality cat food, fresh whole carcasses (such as mice or chicks)
- Taste preferences develop in the first months, therefore different foods should be offered to ferrets at a young age
- Fresh water should always be available in a bottle or bowl and changed daily.

Caging and Bedding

- Cages should have a flat bottom (no wire) to prevent foot injuries. They do well in multi-level cages that allow room to jump and turn.
 - Cage bars must be close enough together so that the ferret cannot get its head or teeth stuck
- Bedding should be soft towels and blankets. Many ferrets enjoy hammocks and fleece huts.
- Ferrets are easily litter-trained. Place a large litter box in the corner of the cage and fill with unscented, non-clumping litter (recycled paper bedding or pelleted litter).

Enrichment

- Toys that ferrets can use to hide or burrow in are very popular; options include boxes, paper bags, shredded paper, and tubes
- Supervised time outside the cage can provide mental stimulation and opportunities for exercise, however, ensure the environment is safe.
 - Limit access to small crevices and openings where your ferret could get stuck
 - Be sure your ferret doesn't have access to anything they can chew and swallow inappropriately. Ingestion of foreign material is very common in ferrets, especially items made of rubber (remote control buttons, rubber doorstops, erasers, etc.)
- Ferrets are very social, and most tend to do best if kept with other ferrets.



Preventative Veterinary Care

- Ferrets require yearly veterinary exams to evaluate their overall health and well-being
- *Vaccines:*
 - Rabies vaccines are required annually
 - Distemper vaccines are recommended annually, especially if your ferret goes outside
 - Ferrets are at a higher risk for vaccine reactions than some other species. Special protocols are in place to reduce those risks.
 - Every ferret is hospitalized for at least 1-2 hours for vaccination appointments for appropriate post-vaccination monitoring
 - Every ferret receives an injection of diphenhydramine (Benadryl) prior to vaccination.
 - Only one vaccination is given at a time.
 - The ferret's heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature, and attitude are monitored every 5 minutes for half an hour after the vaccine is given to monitor for reactions.
- Most ferrets in the United States are spayed or neutered and descented before they are sent to pet stores. All female ferrets should be spayed to prevent risk of fatal anemia (low red blood cell count) due to their persistent estrus.

Important Medical Conditions

- Signs of common ferret diseases
 - *Insulinoma*: weakness, exercise intolerance, collapse, pawing at mouth, seizures
 - *Adrenal disease*: hair loss, itchiness, straining to urinate (males), enlarged vulva (females)
 - *Foreign body*: drooling, loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting, tooth grinding
 - *Human influenza virus*: fever, coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, watery eyes
 - Ferrets can catch the flu from humans. If you have the flu avoid close contact with your ferret, wear a mask, and wash your hands frequently.
 - *Helicobacter gastritis*: loss of appetite, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark colored stool
 - *Lymphoma*: decreased energy level and appetite, weight loss, diarrhea, swollen lymph nodes
- If your ferret is exhibiting decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, straining to urinate, or any other concerning changes in behavior, contact a veterinarian right away