

Caring for Your Pet Ferret

Caging and Bedding

- Ferret cages should have a flat bottom to prevent foot injuries and should be large enough for the ferret to run around in. Multi-level cages for ferrets are very popular. The cage bars must be close enough together so that the ferret cannot get its head through or its teeth stuck.
- Bedding should be soft towels and blankets – ferrets love to burrow and snuggle! Many ferrets also enjoy hammocks and fleece huts.
- Ferrets are easily litter-trained. Pick a litter box that is large enough for your ferret and use an unscented, non-clumping litter. We recommend either a recycled paper bedding (e.g. Carefresh) or pelleted litter (e.g. Yesterday's News). It is best to place the litter box in the corner of the cage.

Food and Water

- Ferrets are obligate carnivores, meaning it's essential for their survival. So a high protein, low carbohydrate diet is important. If available, we recommend a commercial diet formulated specifically for ferrets. Your ferret should have dry food available at all times.
- Appropriate treats for ferrets include small pieces of cooked, unsalted meat, meat-based baby food, or high-quality kitten food. Avoid feeding your ferret treats that are high in sugar.
- Fresh water should always be available and changed daily in either a bowl or a bottle, depending on what your ferret prefers.
- *Learn more about the recommended diet for ferret's below*

Activity and Enrichment

- Ferrets enjoy toys that they can hide and burrow in. Boxes, paper bags, shredded paper, and other packing materials are very popular.
- If your ferret spends time outside the cage, be sure that he/she does not have access to small crevices where he/she could get stuck.
- Ingestion of foreign/inappropriate material is very common in ferrets. They are especially inclined to eat things that are made out of rubber, so be sure that your ferret doesn't have access to erasers, remote control buttons, rubber doorstops, and other similar items.
- Ferrets are social animals, and most ferrets will be happier if they have another ferret to play with.

Veterinary Care

- Ferrets require yearly veterinary exams to evaluate their overall health and well-being.
- Ferrets are required by law to be vaccinated annually against rabies in North Carolina and it is recommended that they be vaccinated against distemper. Ferrets are prone to vaccine reactions, so your veterinarian may ask you to stay for a monitoring period of 30 minutes to an hour after your ferret is vaccinated. We recommend that you schedule your vaccine appointment on a day when you can be home with your ferret for the rest of the day.
- Ferrets can catch the flu from humans, so avoid handling your ferret when you are sick.
- Signs of common ferret diseases:
 - Insulinoma: weakness, exercise intolerance, collapse, pawing at the mouth, seizures
 - Adrenal disease: hair loss, itchiness, straining to urinate (males), enlarged vulva (females)
 - Foreign body: drooling, loss of appetite, tooth grinding (sign of pain)
- If your ferret is exhibiting decreased appetite, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, straining to urinate, or exhibiting other concerning changes in behavior, please contact a veterinarian right away.
- *Learn more about ferret immunization's below*

Ferret Diet

Ferrets, like cats, are obligate carnivores. Meaning that they are designed to eat a meat-based diet and cannot use fiber or carbohydrates very effectively. Ferrets should be fed a diet high in animal protein for energy with minimal carbohydrates and fiber.

Kibble:

The ideal adult ferret diet should have 30% - 35% crude protein and a fat content of 15% - 20%. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines for the proper amount to feed your ferret, usually about 1/2 cup per ferret each day. Ferrets can develop problems with low blood sugar (due to a disease called insulinoma that is common in ferrets), so we recommend having food available at all times.

Treats:

Appropriate treats include a small amount of high-quality canned cat food, cooked meats, or cooked egg whites. Ferrets like sweets, but sugar-coated treats and grains should be avoided. You may want to consider using treats as an opportunity to provide enrichment for your ferret by hiding them inside a toy and making your ferret work to get them out. This concept is called "captive foraging," and while it was originally developed for birds and zoo animals, it is a lot of fun for ferrets too.

Water:

Ferrets should have access to water at all times, either in a water bottle or a heavy flat-bottomed bowl. Many ferrets like to play in water, so most ferret owners provide drinking water in a bottle and offer occasional play-time in the bathtub or a small basin of water.

Whole prey diets:

Some people advocate feeding whole prey to ferrets because it more closely approximates their "natural" diet and provides a source of enrichment. However, feeding raw carcasses presents significant health risks for your ferret because carcasses can be contaminated with a wide variety of food-borne illnesses, such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. These bacteria can make your ferret sick and they can also be spread to the rest of your family, especially children and people who are immunocompromised.

Ferret Immunization

What vaccines are recommended in domestic ferrets?

Rabies Vaccine

- What? – Rabies is a deadly virus that can infect any mammal. It is shed in the saliva of infected animals.
- How? – Mammals, including humans, can be infected with rabies by being bitten by a rabid animal or by infected saliva contacting mucous membranes.
- Why? – Rabies is an incurable neurological disease and poses a serious health risk to humans and other animals. Therefore, rabies vaccination of ferrets is required by law in North Carolina and many other states.
- When? – Vaccinate ferrets at 16 weeks of age and then annually.

Distemper Vaccine

- What? Canine distemper virus (CDV) is a deadly virus to both dogs and ferrets. Ferrets do not have their own distemper virus; they can only get the canine distemper virus, not feline distemper.
- How? – Distemper is spread through ocular discharge, nasal discharge, saliva, urine, and feces. Aerosols and contaminated objects can also transmit CDV.
- Why? – CDV is 100% fatal in ferrets.
- When? – Vaccinate ferret at 12 weeks of age, 16 weeks, and then annually.

Vaccine reactions:

- After giving a distemper vaccine and/or rabies vaccine, most veterinarians recommend keeping ferrets for at least 30 minutes for observation for a vaccine reaction. However, vaccine reactions can still occur for up to 72 hours after vaccination.
- To help lessen the severity of a vaccine reaction, your veterinarian may pre-medicate your ferret with an anti-histamine (e.g. Benadryl) prior to vaccination. Most veterinarians prefer to give the distemper and rabies vaccines at separate visits. This reduces the risk of a reaction and, if a reaction occurs, allows us to know which vaccine the ferret reacted to.
- Your ferret should be monitored for one or more of the following signs following vaccination: vomiting, diarrhea, restlessness, nausea, swollen face, hives, redness and itching, collapse and respiratory difficulty. If you see any of these signs, please take your ferret to your veterinarian or the closest veterinary emergency clinic as soon as possible. Most ferrets recover if treated promptly, but vaccine reactions can be fatal.
- If your ferret has had a history of a vaccine reaction, please talk to your veterinarian about your options for vaccinations and possible prevention of vaccine reactions. Ferrets that have tolerated vaccination in the past can still develop hypersensitivity to vaccines later in life.

