

CARE ♦ PETS

Animal Hospital & Wellness Center

The Best Care For Your Companion

All about Ferrets

Facts about Ferrets:

- Ferrets belong to the family Mustelidae; their relatives include weasels, mink and otters.
- Ferrets are joyful, interactive and entertaining, relatively easy to care for.
- Ferrets can live 5-10 years.

Ferret Traits and Behavior:

- Ferrets are mischievous thieves. They are liable to steal items and stash them in unknown or difficult-to-reach areas.
- Ferrets are independent creatures; they rarely sit still. They can also be destructive.
- Ferrets are quiet compared to other companion animals. Some sounds that ferrets can emit are: “clucking” (giggle), hissing (exuberance, anger), squeaking (pain, surprise, fighting) and rarely, screaming (extremely frightened, pain).
- Male ferrets are “hobs” and females are “jills.” Baby ferrets are “kits.”
- A jill’s litter size can range from 7 to 14 kits. Gestation period runs 42 days.
- Most ferrets have already been surgically altered and descented before purchase. Although most ferrets are descented at the time of neutering, a characteristic musty odor always remains.
- Jills must be spayed if not intended for breeding. They are induced ovulators with a prolonged estrus (heat cycle). If they do not ovulate, they will remain in estrus and may develop aplastic anemia.

Habitat:

- There are many cages designed for ferrets with multiple levels and constructed of galvanized metal and plastic. Floors made of hard plastic are easiest to clean.
- Any housing for ferrets must be “ferret proofed” to prevent escape. Anywhere a ferret’s head can fit, the rest of the ferret is likely to follow.
- Cage bedding must be changed and washed regularly to control odor. Blankets and old sweatshirts work great for bedding.

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- Ferrets can be litter box trained. Pelleted fiber materials work best for litter.
- Ferrets will sleep in hammocks or in blankets.
- Hard plastic tunnels and clothes dryer exhaust tubing can provide a source of entertainment for your ferret. However, soft rubber or stuffed toys should not be used as ferrets may try to eat them.

Diet:

- Ferrets are carnivores. A ferret's diet should contain 30-35% animal protein and 15-20% fat and be low in carbohydrates.
- There are many formulated, high-quality ferret diets available. These should be based on animal proteins as the principal ingredient(s) with limited amounts of cereal grains and sugars.
- Fresh meat or an egg can be used as treats. Sugary treats, such as raisins, bananas and other fruits should be avoided.
- Free choice feeding is recommended due to the ferret's high metabolic rate.
- Unless fed very high fat foods, ferrets generally eat as much as they want without becoming obese.
- Water should be available at all times. A water bottle with a sipper tube is best, as they often play with a bowl.
- Ferrets can obstruct on inappropriate food items, such as carrots and papaya.

Health:

- Regular visits to the veterinarian are recommended for your ferret. Wellness checkups are necessary to recognize potential disease and treat it early.
- Ferrets should be vaccinated for canine distemper virus at 6, 10 and 14 weeks of age. And then boosted yearly for the rest of the ferret's life.
- Ferrets also need to be vaccinated for rabies. The first vaccine is given at 3 months of age, followed by an annual booster. (Required by law in Indiana)
- Flea control is recommended.

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- Most common disorders of ferrets can include GI obstruction (young ferrets are prone to ingestion of toys), adrenal disease, dental disease, cancer, traumatic injuries and heart problems such as cardiomyopathy or congestive heart failure.
- There are some health issues that have zoonotic potential (can be passed to humans). Some examples are giardia, salmonella, Influenza virus A and rabies.
- Signs of a healthy ferret include bright clear eyes and clean teeth, dry or slightly moist nose, trim nails, curious and playful attitude, smooth glistening full coat, clean anus and supple, elongated abdomen with no abnormal lumps.