

FERRET FIRST AID



**Coping With Emergencies
When To Call The Vet
Vaccination & Health
Information**

By Ann Davis
ACME Ferret Company
and
Jean Wardell DVM

Copyright ACME Ferret Company,
First Edition, January 1996
Updated March 1996,
September 1996

Art work-Ann Davis
Cartoons-Kimberly Killian

P.O. Box 11007
Burke, VA 22009-1007

This booklet is intended to fill a need in the ferret community and may be copied without direct permission from the publisher as long as it is copied in full with no changes made to the contents nor any sections/artwork removed. Sections may be quoted so long as proper credit is given to the publication and authors.

A hard copy of this publication in booklet form, including the art work by Kimberly Killian, may be obtained by sending a SASE (55 cents postage) size 6" x 9" to ACME Ferret Company, P.O. Box 11007, Burke, VA 22009-1007.

{Note: mail sent to the above address comes back as undeliverable.}

IMPORTANT NOTE:

THIS MANUAL IS NOT INTENDED TO TAKE THE PLACE OF EXPERT VETERINARY CARE! IT IS ONLY INTENDED AS ASSISTANCE TO HELP YOU DETERMINE IF YOU HAVE A SERIOUS SITUATION AND HELP YOU MAINTAIN YOUR FERRET'S LIFE UNTIL YOU CAN OBTAIN MEDICAL ATTENTION.

Ann Davis is director of ACME Ferret Company Rescue in Springfield, Virginia, National Coordinator for the League of Independent Ferret Enthusiasts, Ferret Coordinator for the Project BREED Rescue Directory, and Rescue Chair for the Ark Angels of LIFE Rescue/Shelters.

Dr. Jean Wardell practices Veterinary Medicine in Annandale, Virginia. She has a large ferret practice and is interested in sonography, especially ferret cardiology. Dr. Wardell would be happy to answer inquiries from other veterinarians via fax (703) 941-5340.

Table of Contents

- [The Domestic Ferret, an overview](#)
 - [Designing a Cage](#)
 - [Vaccinations](#)
 - [Spay/Neuter](#)
 - [Heartworm](#)
 - [Diet](#)
 - [Ears](#)
 - [Grooming](#)
 - [Exercise](#)
 - [Heat/Cold variables](#)
 - [Ferret Proofing](#)
 - [Teeth](#)
 - [Ferret First Aid Kit](#)
 - [RED FLAG SYMPTOMS OF LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCIES](#)
-- [Listed Alphabetically by Symptom](#)
 - [Poison/ Vet Hot Line](#)
 - [Highrise Syndrome](#)
 - [ABNORMAL SYMPTOMS REQUIRING EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT](#)
-- [Listed Alphabetically by Symptom](#)
 - [Temperature, taking](#)
 - [Giving Medication, liquid/pills](#)
 - [Artificial Respiration](#)
 - [Moving an Injured Ferret](#)
 - [Duck Soup for sick ferrets](#)
 - [Caring for Sick Ferrets/Tips](#)
-
- [The Basis For Good Nutrition](#)
 - [Ferret Health & Vaccination Record](#) - suggested form for each ferret
-

The Domestic Ferret, An Overview

The domestic ferret in America today evolved from the European polecat and is the only domesticated member of the weasel family (mustelidae), which also includes mink, otters, skunks, and the endangered North American black-footed ferret. Domestic ferrets weigh between 1-1/2 and 5-1/2 pounds, reaching maturity at 9 months, and normally live 7-9 years. There are about a dozen distinct coloration patterns, including chocolate, cinnamon, sable, albino, and silver mitt.

Ferrets are intelligent, resourceful, curious, frolicsome animals. Their characteristic play mode--arching the back, hopping up and down, and tumbling backwards with gleeful abandon--is sometimes called the "weasel war dance." They also make a variety of sounds, from a gentle clucking song known as "dooking" to a punctuated panting sound in the middle of rambunctious play. They are affectionate companions who enjoy interacting with each other, dogs, cats, and humans. Even if abused by a previous owner, ferrets generally respond appreciatively to gentle handling, and rescues quickly bond with their new human companions.

Ferrets rescued from large mills are often not socialized and need to be taught that biting is unacceptable. This can be done with a gentle "thump" to the nose. As with any companion animal, it is not recommended that they be left alone with small children.

They can be litter and leash trained, but if allowed to run free in the house, care must be taken to prevent access to cabinets, vents, under sides of appliances, and other potential danger points (pipes, containers of detergents or solvents) which their natural inquisitiveness may lead them to explore. For example recliners must always be in an upright position when ferrets are out. These gifted escape artists must not be allowed to venture outside except under close and constant supervision, for they have a poor sense of direction and cannot survive for more than a few days on their own. They should be kept confined to one room or cage when their human companions are not at home. Water and food should always be available. (Ferrets do not overeat.)

It is important to vaccinate ferrets against canine distemper, which is invariably fatal to them. Young ferrets or "kits" as they are called should be vaccinated at 8-10, 12-14, and 16-18 weeks, with a yearly booster. There is also an approved rabies vaccination for ferrets.

Female ferrets ("jills") must mate or die. If they are not taken out of heat by a male ("hob") or spayed, they will eventually develop aplastic anemia, which is fatal. Descending, to remove the musk glands, is considered mutilation, and should only be considered when there is no alternative. Ferrets' teeth need to be cleaned, just like dogs and cats, and their claws, which are not retractable, should be clipped short like a dog's. Neither teeth filing nor declawing is considered humane treatment.

Rescued ferrets, particularly when found out of doors, are likely to be suffering from malnutrition and dehydration. In a dehydration emergency, a 1:1 solution of Karo syrup and water, or honey and water, can be administered until veterinary care is available. Healthy ferrets normally eat high-protein dry kitten food, though some will eat bits of fruit or vegetables as snacks. They should never be fed bones, which can cause intestinal damage. Dairy products, which can cause diarrhea, should be avoided. A ferret too weak to eat can often be coaxed to drink a liquid food supplement such as Sustacal or eat a high-calorie paste such as Nutri-Cal. See [Duck Soup Recipe](#).

Ferrets are vulnerable to common respiratory infections, including colds and flus. They should never be given aspirin. They are also quite susceptible to heat exhaustion and heat stroke in temperatures exceeding 85 degrees, particularly in direct sunlight. It is essential to house ferrets inside, since they are vulnerable to diseases carried by wild animals and are often sought as prey by marauding raccoons. Ferrets that are kept out of doors often succumb to heartworm.

If the opportunity presents itself, they will often swallow indigestible articles such as rubber bands or pieces of vinyl squeak toys, causing intestinal blockage. Persistent vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy, and dehydration are indications of blockage; prompt veterinary attention is essential. Other symptoms warranting veterinary attention are blood in the urine, severe hair loss, breathing difficulty, inability to urinate, dramatic weight loss, lethargy and weakness, loss of color in gums, and constant scratching or chewing of the paws.

Persistent hair loss may be a sign of adrenal carcinoma, a disease remedied by surgical removal of the affected adrenal gland. Drooling or staggering may be signs of insulinoma (a form of pancreatic cancer), which is treatable through drugs and/or surgery, sometimes prolonging a ferret's life for as much as 2 years, but is eventually fatal.

Designing A Ferret Cage

The cage is the most important piece of equipment you can purchase or build for a ferret. It must be escape-proof and big enough for a food and water dish, litter box, and nesting area, while allowing adequate room for the ferret to move around. A cage approximately 36" wide by 24" long and 24" high, so the ferret can stand up, works best. Wire sides are useful to ensure adequate light, which is essential to a good ferret coat and healthy animal. Avoid pressure-treated wood and painted wood that can chip off or be ingested, and NEVER use an aquarium. Some people advocate hanging a water bottle on the outside so ferrets cannot knock it over, but a dish of fresh water, which they like to clean their faces in, should always be available inside the cage.

The nesting area should contain towels or old t-shirts, which ferrets love to hide in. Many ferrets love small hammocks that can be hung from the ceiling of the cage. Do not use cedar or pine chips anywhere near ferrets, as they cause respiratory problems. The new paper pellet litter is recommended.

Vaccinations

Canine Distemper is fatal in ferrets. Kits should receive a series of shots at 8 weeks, 12 weeks, and 16 weeks, then a booster every year. We use Galaxy D which does not contain any unnecessary additives. There is also a USDA approved Rabies vaccine made by Rhone Merieux called Imrab. There may or may not be a quarantine period in your area. Ferrets so far are not known to shed the virus, but it is 100% fatal. Some states have enacted quarantine periods of 14-21 days. Known ferret rabies cases are rare. There are no known ferret to human transmissions.

Spay/Neuter

Alteration of sexual status should be performed at 6 months of age. If these procedures are performed prematurely, endocrine and metabolic abnormalities have the likely potential of developing. Females are susceptible to a life threatening condition where they are unable to produce red blood cells subsequent to a prolonged estrus cycle of greater than one month. In a female the heat cycle is manifested by an obviously enlarged reddened vulva. This may look like a tiny bright pink donut located underneath the tail that has a reddish liquid central discharge. If a female in heat is not mated or spayed and her estrus cycle continues for more than 4 weeks she will develop the metabolic condition previously described.

Heartworm Preventative

If you live in an area where mosquitos are a problem for a significant part of the year your ferret should be on an oral heartworm preventative. The dosage and frequency will be specified by your veterinarian.

Diet

Feed a high quality dry ferret or kitten food with at least 32% protein. Ferrets also like a variety of tastes, preferring chicken and lamb. We mix three kinds together, alternating brands. Steer towards all natural foods preserved with Vitamin E and little star shapes. Steer away from pellet shapes or fish based food. Many ferrets also like fresh fruits including dates and raisins and some vegetables but cannot digest seeds or other rough hard foods, so care must be taken to remove them— for instance, feed seedless watermelon. All fruit and vegetables must be looked at as treats, not substituted for nutritionally balanced dry food. Limit amount of treats to one teaspoon per day. Food and water should be made available at all times. Ferrets as a rule do not overeat, but if you have an overweight ferret and have eliminated other causes, there are good reduced-calorie cat foods on the market. Please consult with your vet before placing a ferret on a restricted diet. For more information, see "[The Basis for Good Nutrition](#)."

Ears

Ferrets have naturally waxy ears which must be cleaned regularly. Any good ear wash will do. They are also susceptible to ear mites. Use Tresederm or any other similar product. Place a little ear wash on the end of a cotton swab and gently wipe the interior of the ear. Repeat several times. Clogged ears will become infected, causing hearing loss and sometimes loss of balance.

Grooming

Bathing is part of good health for your ferret. Once a week is recommended due to the high amount of oil they produce in their skin. Any mild soap followed by a good cream rinse will do. When you wash them, you wash away the oils, so ferrets have a tendency to scratch; the cream rinse takes care of that and also cuts down on dander, which is a bonus if you have allergies. Use warm running water and rub dry with a soft towel. They will then run around the house much like a small dog trying to dry on every soft surface. If sharing the house with another outside animal, they can pick up fleas. There are good shampoos available with natural peppermint, or much stronger Pyrethrum- -as long as it is safe for kittens, these are fine.

NEVER DIP A FERRET!

Exercise

Play and activity are essential to good health. Ferrets need at least 4 hours free time a day, more is preferable. A ferret will sleep about 18 hours out of every 24 in small intervals, but will quickly adapt to your schedule. A ferret that is caged too much will develop apathy and depression. This will result in their either refusing food or getting too fat, eating out of boredom. If a ferret has "love handles" it needs more time out! They are naturally curious and will entertain themselves, coming around often to seek you out to play. They are also good sleeping companions and like to snuggle under the covers at night, getting up only to use the litter pan or eat.

Note: it is normal for a ferret to lose its coat and up to 30% of body weight every summer. If it is otherwise acting healthy, do not worry.

Heat and Cold

Domestic ferrets should be kept inside. Contrary to lots of misinformation out in the public domain, they are not wild animals and have lost most of their survival skills. Ferrets can take the cold as long as they are kept warm and dry, so if your power goes off in the middle of a blizzard don't panic, just throw some extra bedding in with them. Remember, ferrets can catch the common cold, so prolonged cold stress or dampness will give you a sick animal.

Heat is another matter. They simply cannot take temperatures much over 85 degrees without getting dehydrated or heat stroke. A ferret's cage should never be placed in direct

sunlight where it cannot seek shade. Never leave your ferret unattended in a car... even in a carrier, with the windows partially opened, it can rapidly succumb to heat stroke.

Ferret Proofing

Ferrets are profoundly curious animals. Any small crevice or crack or drain pipe is an invitation to adventure. As you can imagine, they sometimes get stuck and can't get back. You need to stop up all holes under counters and kick boards, vents in the back of dryers leading to the outside, under refrigerators and stoves and so forth. Ferrets are great escape artists who would put Houdini to shame. Once a ferret gets out, it will travel and play until it gets tired or hungry, then seek human companionship for food and shelter. This can be one or two miles! Ferrets also love to jump into the ice box and dishwasher. They also like nothing better than to sleep in laundry baskets. So you must be very careful when doing laundry or other chores involving large machines. Reclining chairs are a death trap. In short, treat ferrets as if they were toddlers. A ferret's motto is, "If it's there, I should investigate it!"

Teeth

Teeth need to be kept clean and free from tartar just as in dogs and cats. The dry food will keep the teeth pretty clean, but it is a good idea to get in the habit of checking teeth at bath time. Ferrets tend to chip their canines on various things. A small chip off the tip is not a worry, but if the tooth looks like it is missing by 1/3 you should take the animal to the vet. Young ferrets have bright white teeth. Older ferrets do get rotten teeth and they can be removed easily. The teeth begin to turn sort of transparent and more ivory with age. Bad teeth are easy to spot. They will be dark just like human cavities.

Ferret First Aid Kit

- Gauze bandage rolls
 - Scissors
 - Eyedropper
 - Q-Tips
 - 3% Hydrogen peroxide
 - Antibacterial ointment
 - Betadine
 - Vaseline
 - Eyewash (.9 to .2% boric acid)
 - Styptic pencil
 - Kaopectate
 - Karo Syrup or Honey
 - Rectal thermometer
 - Chemical ice pack
 - Towels and washcloths
-

Poisons

Antifreeze (Ethylene Glycol)

Motor Oil or other petroleum products

Plant Intoxication-most common house plants

Rat poison or bug bait

Detergents or cleaning agents

Snake bites

Some of these have antidotes. You must first try to determine what the ferret has ingested, then call the Veterinary Poison Control 1-900-680-0000 There is a small charge for the call, but it is the only 24-hr Veterinarian-answered poison information service in the country. They are prompt and accurate. This is the service that your vet uses, and it could save an animal's life.

Highrise Syndrome

Many animals are injured each year in falls from upper story apartments. Ferrets are no exception. They do not realize that the window screen does not lead to freedom but to death. Ferrets are pretty bold in their jumping and playing. To a ferret, just because it can't see the bottom doesn't mean it shouldn't jump!

Taking Your Ferret's Temperature

Shake down the thermometer. Coat it with some lubricant such as Vaseline. If necessary, distract the ferret with a treat and have someone hold him. Insert 1/2 inch into rectum, wait one minute, remove and read. Normal temperature range is 101-103 degrees.

How To Give Medication

Liquid Medication: administer with dropper or syringe in the side of the mouth; do not give too rapidly or forcefully. Allow ferret time to swallow or may risk the development of a life-threatening lung infection, if some of the medication accidentally enters the trachea. .

Pills: some ferrets will accept a pill in a raisin or grape, or with some Linatone or Ferratone. Tablets may be pushed to the back of the mouth near the throat; swallowing is encouraged by stroking the neck. "Pet pillers" are another alternative and are usually carried by veterinarians.

Artificial Respiration

For a ferret, this should only be done by an experienced ferret care giver, since the volume of their lungs is so small there is a great chance of rupture. CPR should only be done by an experienced ferret care giver. In such a small animal, overenthusiastic compression can cause fractured ribs and bruised lungs.

Moving An Injured Ferret

Gently wrap in a bulky material such as a towel or pillowcase. A full body wrap works best. Ensure that the head is fully exposed to allow proper breathing. Seek veterinary attention immediately.

DUCK SOUP, from ACME Ferret Co.

Lucki Duck the Acme ferret is no longer around, but his soup recipe is still doing wonders for old and stressed ferrets. It is perfect for ferrets recovering from illness and surgery, or ferrets just too sick to eat. It is also good for nursing jills.

- One can Sustacal 8oz (this is non-dairy)
- One can water
- 4oz dry food -soaked in enough water to cover and soften completely
- Optional-electrolyte water (really helps-comes in powder form), baby food such as chicken or mashed bananas

Mix well- a blender is best, and it freezes in ice cube trays beautifully.

Serve warm, let them eat their fill several times a day. If it gets too thick just thin with a little water. Once opened, Sustacal must be used within 48 hrs if not frozen. If you have a really seriously ill ferret, warm Sustacal can be given full strength.

Caring for Sick Ferrets

Sick or injured ferrets dehydrate fast. Once a ferret "goes down" it is often difficult to bring them back. **NEVER DELAY TREATMENT!** Even when you think they are eating and drinking they may not be getting enough calories or electrolytes. It is always wise to hand feed when you are not sure. For really sick ferrets, hand feed every 4 hours. They have a quick digestive system. Everything they eat goes through their system in 4 to 5 hrs. Powdered electrolytes are one of the many "little miracles" we have found to work wonders in ferret recovery. The Acme ferrets receive electrolytes in their water on a daily basis.

A sick ferrets needs to keep warm. Never put them on an electric pad! Plenty of clean towels in their cage and towel draped over the back and sides will provide a warm environment.

Ferrets are very social animals and quickly become attached to you. The best thing you can do for a sick ferret is to hold it. Contact, and the sound of your voice are important to a ferret's well being.

Ann Davis

RED FLAG SYMPTOMS: LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCIES (LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)

- [Animal Bites/deep puncture wounds](#)
 - [Bleeding](#)
 - [Breathing, labored](#)
 - [Broken Bones](#)
 - [Burns](#)
 - [Choking/Retching/Vomiting](#)
 - [Convulsions](#)
 - [Dislocations](#)
 - [Drowning](#)
 - [Ear Injuries](#)
 - [Electric Cord Bite/shock](#)
 - [Eye injuries](#)
 - [Fainting or loss of balance](#)
 - [Frostbite/Hypothermia](#)
 - [Head Injuries](#)
 - [Heatstroke](#)
 - [Loss of Color of Gums and Nose](#)
 - [Nose, Face & Jaw Injuries/nosebleeds](#)
 - [Spinal or nerve injuries](#)
 - [Unconsciousness](#)
 - [Urination difficulties](#)
-

Animal Bites/deep puncture wounds

Clean affected area with hydrogen peroxide. Do not apply any ointment to an injury which penetrates the full skin thickness.

Bleeding

If possible, stop any serious bleeding by using direct pressure and a styptic pencil or powder.

Breathing, labored

Any sounds of harshness, fluid, or increased effort needed to inhale or exhale, panting or open-mouthed breathing.

Broken Bones

Manifested by inability to stand without pain, support weight normally, or move or walk normally. Ferret may vocalize, cry, or make some other unusual noise when picked up. There may be visible or internal swelling, with tenderness at the area affected.

Burns

Non-chemical: apply cool compress, then light application of antibiotic ointment or aloe vera gel.

Chemical: rinse with cool water, apply cool compress, followed by light application of antibiotic ointment or aloe vera gel.

Choking/Retching/Vomiting

Many different causes which include foreign body in esophagus, severe gastric ulcers, foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract which may be partially or completely causing an obstructing internal bleeding of respiratory system (i.e. lungs filling up with blood which the ferret Coughs up and swallows).

Convulsions

Try giving 2-3cc Karo syrup or honey only if ferret is able to swallow. Ensure that ferret cannot harm itself on hard, sharp or dangerous objects.

Dislocations

Swelling of any joint or limb, sometimes both. Restrict activity or immobilize in a towel until veterinary attention can be sought.

Drowning

Keep ferrets away from water! They can only swim for a few minutes before succumbing to exhaustion. The amount of chlorine normally present in pools can be extremely irritating to a ferret's eyes.

Ear Injuries

May range from bites and scrapes to avulsions (tearing off of tissue). Minor wounds may be cleaned and antibiotic ointment applied. Stop overt bleeding with direct pressure. Never insert a Q-Tip deep into the ear canal, as rupture of the eardrum may result.

Electric Cord Bite/shock

Burns of the lips and gums may be visible. Ferret may be lying on its side having difficulty breathing. The most common consequence of electric shock is pulmonary edema (fluid accumulating in the lungs).

Eye injuries

Can include scratches, perforating injuries, foreign bodies, chemical or contact corneal trauma. All are absolute medical emergencies.

Fainting or loss of balance

Manifested by the ferret collapsing or showing weakness that is generalized or confined to the hind limbs. Could be a cardiac or metabolic problem. Try giving 1-3cc of Karo syrup or honey, only if the ferret can swallow.

Frostbite/Hypothermia

Gently massage extremities and body. Keep the warming process gradual. Heating pads may be used if kept on "low" and the ferret is checked frequently. Bluish or black discoloration of the skin or limbs is very serious.

Head Injuries

If ferret is unconscious or bleeding from ears/nose/mouth, keep horizontal and immobilized. Keep movement to an absolute minimum, since cervical (neck) injuries often occur along with head injuries; too much movement may result in permanent injury or paralysis.

Heatstroke

Never leave a ferret in an enclosed area in the sun without adequate shade. Never leave a ferret in the car with the windows closed... even with them open, ferrets can overheat easily. Immediately wrap in a cool, wet wash cloth. Freshen with cool water every couple of minutes. Repeat procedure until ferret's body temperature is below 103 degrees.

Loss of Color of Gums and Nose

Gums and nose should be pink. Pale or white gums are a serious problem. May indicate internal bleeding or shock. Conversely, gums which are bright red are the sign of a serious problem such as toxemia (overwhelming systemic infection).

Nose, Face & Jaw Injuries/nosebleeds

If nosebleed is minor, apply direct pressure using gauze tissue, etc. nose, face and jaw fractures or injuries are serious, and handling should be kept to a minimum. Transport ferret to the vet wrapped in a towel.

Spinal or nerve injuries

Symptoms may include wobbly gait, tenderness, difficulty in breathing, or inability to move front legs, rear legs, or both.

Unconsciousness

If possible, take careful note so you can tell the vet whether ferret is breathing quickly or slowly, whether the pupils are dilated or very small, whether muscles are supple or stiff, and whether ferret is responsive to voices and/or touch.

Urination difficulties

Straining to urinate, inability to urinate, producing small amounts of urine, or abnormal color to urine. May indicate infection, bladder stones, or urinary tract blockage.

ABNORMAL SYMPTOMS REQUIRING EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT BUT NOT LIFE THREATENING

- [Animal Bites/scratches](#)
 - [Constipation](#)
 - [Diarrhea](#)
 - [Drooling and or pawing frantically at mouth](#)
 - [Hair Loss](#)
 - [Insect Bite](#)
 - [Itchy skin](#)
 - [Red blotches on the tummy and or hives](#)
 - [Sneezing](#)
 - [Sprains and strains](#)
-

Animal Bites/scratches

Clean affected area with hydrogen peroxide. Do not attempt to bandage area — ferret will not tolerate it. Apply antibiotic ointment. If not noticeably improved in one day, or if condition worsens, seek medical attention.

Constipation

Signs include, straining to defecate, vocalizing when trying to pass a bowel movement, scant, reduced, or absent stool volume, thin, watery stools. Administer Laxatone or comparable furball medication every 4 hours for 3 to 4 doses. If no improvement noted see your vet.

Diarrhea

A green stool is an indication of increased rate of passage of feces through digestive tract. Is acceptable every once in a while. A green stool, or one that is bloody, mucoid, dark, sticky, has worms or foreign material is definitely abnormal. If diarrhea persists for over 24 hours, seek veterinary attention as serious dehydration is likely.

Drooling and or pawing frantically at mouth

Symptom of an insulin-secreting tumor of the pancreas or severe stomach ulcers. Signs may be indicative of an impending crisis. See [Convulsions](#).

Hair Loss

Rat Tail, the loss of all the hair on the tail, is a common sign of stress in a ferret. When the stress is eliminated, the hair will return with the next fall coat.

Persistent hair loss, starting at the base of the tail and gradually moving up the back and over the entire body, may be a sign of adrenal carcinoma, a disease which is remedied by surgical removal of the affected adrenal gland. If left untreated this condition will eventually lead to death.

Insect Bite

Clean area with antiseptic solution. Follow with light application of antibiotic ointment.

Itchy skin

May be localized or generalized. The causes include dry skin, dry environment, allergies, parasites or metabolic problem. Try bathing with mild shampoo followed by cream rinse allowing adequate skin contact time. Be sure to rinse thoroughly. If symptoms persist more than 48 hours see your vet.

Red blotches on the tummy and or hives

Most likely an acute hypersensitivity reaction to an allergen which has been contacted or inhaled. Litter material is often a culprit. Try a different brand of litter and giving the ferret a bath.

Sneezing

Usually occurs in clusters. Causes include dust allergies or cold. It is important to know that humans can transfer influenza virus to ferrets very easily. Therefore if you are exhibiting signs of a cold or the flu, use caution when handling and interacting with your ferret.

Sprains and strains

Reluctant to walk or bear weight or does so abnormally or with difficulty. Confine in a pet carrier or cage and restrict activity until medical attention can be sought.

|

The Basis For Good Nutrition

by Dr. Jean Wardell

Sound nutrition translates directly into good health! Ferrets are carnivorous animals, meaning they are strictly meat eaters. In addition, they are characterized by an extremely high metabolic rate. The food that they consume is burned and the nutritional components used very rapidly. Therefore, regardless of age, ferrets should have constant access to food. They eat about 10 small meals over 24 hours. Ingested food is eliminated in 4 hours.

Studies have shown that animals offered a palatable diet will generally eat to fulfill energy needs. When these requirements are satisfied, regulatory mechanisms are activated which cause cessation of eating.

Highly palatable food can interfere with the normal function of these mechanisms. Obesity is an uncommon problem in ferrets owing to their high metabolic rates. Occasionally, however, a ferret can become pudgy, usually after 3 years of age. If your pet is developing this "middle-aged spread," try switching to a diet which contains a lower percentage of fat.

This leads directly into our discussion of fat and other nutritional requirements. It is important for ferrets to have a diet fairly high in animal fat (18-22% is recommended). It is also important for ferrets to have a diet high in MEAT protein such as chicken, beef, or

liver. Fish based foods are not well tolerated or accepted by ferrets, and frequently result in vomiting.

Moreover, fish does not have the proper protein or amino acids needed. This is because animals don't need protein per se. Rather they need the amino acids used to build protein. Ferrets can only use amino acids from meat proteins; they cannot use amino acid from plant proteins. A meat (chicken, beef, or liver, for example) should be listed in the first 3 ingredients on a label to ensure it has enough protein.

Ferrets require 21 amino acids which are either manufactured metabolically or which are obtained from the digestion of food. This latter group is referred to as "essential amino acids"--the word "essential" here means that the amino acid must be obtained from the diet, as ferrets are unable to synthesize them.

When reading the label, make sure the protein level is at least 31 or 32%. One exception to this is with older ferrets, where a higher protein content (>38%) may be detrimental to the kidneys.

Many cat foods sold in grocery stores have cereal or plant proteins in their formulations and as such are not the best dietary choices. For ferrets under 3 to 4 years of age, the growth or kitten formulations of these diets are recommended, because of the higher fat and protein content. A mixture of the two is also acceptable, depending on environment, activity levels, etc.

For ferrets over 4 years of age, the maintenance or adult cat formulations of the aforementioned brands are suitable. These diets also contain adequate levels of Taurine, an amino acid which plays an integral part in good vision (retina health) and maintenance of cardiac function. With recent advances in nutrition, there are now diets such as "Totally Ferret" to meet their unique nutritional needs.

Another item to check on the label is ash content. Ferrets kept on diets relatively high in ash content have a predisposition to develop urinary tract problems such as bladder stones. The brands previously mentioned are all low in ash content.

I suggest avoiding diets that contain Ethoxyquin, a preservative. Evidence indicates it is possible this compound may increase the likelihood of certain types of cancers in dogs, cats, and ferrets.

Milk and dairy products should be avoided, including "milk coated" kitten foods. Diarrhea may result.

It is perfectly normal that we like to spoil our ferrets. Some treats in reasonable quantities are acceptable. Do not give anything with bone or bone fragments. Cooked meat and egg are suitable to offer. Many ferrets love fruits and vegetables, but these should be limited, since they cannot digest or process fiber well. Again, diarrhea may result.

A good rule of thumb is to limit any treat to one teaspoon per day. Some favorites include cucumbers, green peppers, bananas, raisins, dates, and melon.

Avoid feeding foods that are high in complex carbohydrates or refined sugar. Ferrets cannot digest a lot of sugar, and such treats put a strain on the pancreas. Chocolate contains theobromine, which can result in toxicity. We may think that candy is dandy, but resist the temptation to share, no matter how much they beg or how pleadingly cute they look!

[Reprinted from the Spring 1996 edition of THE INDEPENDENT VOICE]

Suggested Form for Maintaining Health Records

Ferret Health and Vaccination Record			
Name _____			
Age _____		Birth Date _____	
Sex _____	Wt. _____	Color _____	
Veterinarian _____			
Visits to the Vet and Immunizations			
DATE	Distemper Lot #	Rabies Tag #	Weight
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—
Comments or permanent conditions:			