



Glenway Animal Hospital
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Frequently Asked Ferret Questions

Congratulations on selecting a ferret to be a member of your family. The doctors and staff of Glenway Animal Hospital are committed to making sure your newest family member lives a long, happy, and healthy life. To help you get started on the right track, we have put together a list of most-asked questions about ferrets with their answers. This list is not all-inclusive, so feel free to consult with us if you have additional questions.

Where should I house my ferret?

The majority of ferrets spend most of their time in cages so we recommend that you purchase the largest one you can afford. Ferrets like to climb, run, swing, and snuggle so it is good if ample space can be provided in the cage for many of these activities. Kits (baby ferrets) often bite and scratch during play; they should be redirected towards other play activities if they do this. Even with a large cage, ferrets need daily play and exercise time, **AT LEAST 2-4 hours** of out-of-the cage playtime. It is IMPERATIVE that out-of-the-cage play be supervised and held in a ferret-proofed space. Ferret-proofing requires removal of small, shiny and metallic objects, blocking off small openings such as dryer hoses or heating vents, removing toxic materials or potential areas where ferrets could fall or have things fall on them. A common ferret injury is being squished in a recliner chair – so be aware of what and where your ferret can and probably will go.

What should I feed my ferret?

Ferrets are obligate carnivores and need to get their energy from protein, not carbohydrates. Their diet needs to contain 35% protein or higher. It has been theorized that diets containing too much carbohydrate predisposes ferrets to insulinomas. One of our favorites is Natural Gold by Pretty Bird International which contains 50% protein. This food can be purchased online. There are also other dry and canned ferret foods available at local pet stores. Be sure to check the label for protein content before purchase. Commercial ferret foods can be supplemented with treats such as Nutrical and Ferretone, cooked chicken or fish (no bones). Many ferret treats that are available commercially are high in carbohydrates and should be avoided. Recently, raw diets have become more popular by ferret enthusiasts, but there are many potential problems (both logistical and physical) with feeding a raw diet. We do not recommend this for our ferret patients. Because of ferret's small size, their gastrointestinal transit time (time it takes for food to go in the mouth to out the back end as stool) is only 3 hours, so fresh food and water should be available to ferrets at all times.

How long can I expect my ferret to live?

The average lifespan of a ferret is 7-9 years. Ferrets are prone to several types of cancer and other medical conditions which can limit the quantity and quality of life so it's important to closely monitor your pet's weight, habits, and appearance and see a veterinarian experienced in ferret care if changes are noted.

Can I take my ferret outside?

Yes, but extreme caution needs to be exercised so that the ferret doesn't get loose (ferrets will die in the wild), injured or otherwise harmed. Keep your ferret on a harness and leash or in a cage. Ferrets that frequent the outdoors are more susceptible to parasites such as fleas, ticks, gastrointestinal worms and heartworms. We recommend using parasite prevention in these ferrets (we like Revolution as it prevents fleas, heartworms, and ear mites). Some ferrets can have allergies to pollens and grasses and are best kept indoors at all times.

Which vaccines do I need to get for my ferret and how often?

Most ferrets have received their first vaccine before they are purchased, but contrary to what many pet owners are led to believe, they are NOT fully vaccinated when they leave the pet store. Kits (young ferrets) need to have a series of vaccines for canine distemper virus (CDV) between the ages of 6 and 14 weeks, then on an annual basis. Canine distemper virus is 100% fatal if contracted, and it can be brought in on shoes, clothing, or via dogs.

Because of recent manufacturer supply issues of the ferret distemper vaccine and potential vaccination reaction risk, we always discuss risk vs. benefits of this vaccination with clients before administering it. Ohio law states that ferrets also need to be vaccinated for Rabies at 3-4 months initially, and then once a year afterwards. It is important that ferrets are vaccinated with ferret-approved vaccines (not dog or cat vaccines) and are given only one vaccine at a time. As a precaution, we ALWAYS recommend you schedule a ferret vaccine appointment when you have time to stay at the hospital for monitoring for 30 minutes after vaccine administration.

Can ferrets get heartworm disease?

Ferrets, like dogs and cats, are susceptible to heartworm infections. This parasite is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. The adult heartworms live in the heart of the ferrets and because of ferret's small size even 1 or 2 worms can be fatal. To prevent heartworm infections we recommend that all ferrets receive heartworm prevention each month. Revolution is a topical heartworm prevention that is available at Glenway Animal Hospital.

Can I catch diseases from my ferret?

Humans and ferrets are susceptible to the same cold and flu viruses so it is possible for you to transmit these common maladies to your ferret and vice versa. Of course, bacterial, fungal and parasitic infections can infect multiple species so good hygiene practices are important, as with any pet. Rabies can be transmitted among any warm-blooded animal, which is why the state of Ohio requires annual rabies vaccination for ferrets. The other common viruses of ferrets, Aleutian Mink Disease (AMD), Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis and cancers cannot be spread to people.

Will ferrets get along with other pets?

Yes – Ferrets usually get along well with other ferrets, cats and dogs, but of course each animal is individual and there are cases where they don't get along. New introductions should be monitored closely for signs of aggression. Be sure they will get along before leaving them alone together. You should never have ferrets and birds in the same household as ferrets will hunt and kill birds. Ferrets should never be left alone with babies or children.

Can ferrets be litterbox trained?

YES! Ferrets have individual preferences for types of litter and usually will select the corner of their cage in which they wish to eliminate (put the litter box there). Unlike cats, ferrets do not bury their droppings, so litter boxes should be scooped twice a day for odor control. "Aromatic" wood shavings (cedar, pine) should be avoided as litter such as these can cause problems with the respiratory tract and liver. Scoopable cat litters can also cause respiratory issues. Newspaper pellets are frequently used. Urinary tract disorders, gastrointestinal parasites, or low-quality food can contribute to difficulty in training. We are not fans of the corner-style litter boxes, but prefer short-sided square or oblong boxes that the ferrets can get into and dig around in and have plenty of room to eliminate comfortably.

What other equipment or supplies are needed for ferrets?

Water bottle or sturdy crock- or water (ferrets love to spill things)

Pet taxi – for trips to the veterinarian, keep handy in case you need to evacuate quickly

Litter boxes and ferret-friendly litter

Hammocks, towels, sleep-sacks, blankets – ferrets love to sleep covered up

Toys – Choose toys that cannot be chewed up or have small parts that ferrets can ingest. Gastrointestinal obstruction by toys and other foreign objects (surgery is required) is a common occurrence.

Ferretone or Nutrical – treats that can be purchased at pet stores that ferrets LOVE.

Nail clippers – nails should be trimmed frequently (approximately every 2 weeks) to prevent quick overgrowth.

Ask us to show you how if you are unfamiliar with trimming your pets' nails.

Ferret shampoo – Even if neutered and descented, ferrets will still have an odor. Bathing helps keep the skin clean and fresh.

Cotton Swabs – for cleaning out that normal, reddish ferret ear wax.

What should I do in case of emergency?

First call our office (662-0224). Our office is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday thru Friday and from 8 a.m. until 12 noon on Saturday. If we do not have a veterinarian that sees ferrets in the office, our office staff can direct you to another veterinarian that is experienced in ferret care. Before taking your ferret to any emergency facility, inquire if there is a veterinarian on duty that is experienced with ferret care; not all ER vets are. Grady Animal Hospital (931-8675) is open 24 hours a day and usually has a veterinarian on staff that will see ferrets. MedVet Hilliard in Columbus 1-614-870-0480 has an exotics experienced veterinarian on staff at all times and can provide critical care and monitoring 24/7/365.

For more information:

- American Ferret Association: www.afa.com, National Ferret Organization - laws, guidelines for vets, for information for owners.
- www.ferretworld.com, www.petferretcare.net, www.ferretuniverse.com, smallanimalchannel.com, exoticpets.about.com are all websites where you can find more information about ferrets

Once again, congratulations on the arrival of your newest family member! If all of your questions have not been answered please call us at 662-0224. Our office is open:

Monday thru Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Selected Saturdays 8 a.m. to 12 p.m

You can also reach us through our email address: glenwvahstaff@fuse.net

To download client information, get directions to our hospital, download forms to fill out before appointments, access our pet library or online pharmacy, visit our website at: www.glenwayanimalhospital.com

