



FERRET CARE

The ferret (*Mustela putorius furo*) was first domesticated over 2000 years ago, and is thought to be descended from the European polecat. Originally it was commonly used for hunting and pest control, but now is often kept as a pet. Due to their great intelligence and inquisitive nature, they can make entertaining pets, but require a lot of attention, and often have a distinctive smell. They can live between 6-7 years if looked after correctly.

ACCOMMODATION

- Ferrets are very active and destructive animals so can be housed in a hutch (minimum size 1.5 x 0.5 x 0.5m for two ferrets) or inside a secure enclosure in the home.
- They are however susceptible to heat stress (due to lack of sweat glands) so should be protected from extremes of temperature.
- If kept inside do not forget their curious nature. Prevent access to anything that can be chewed, eaten or destroyed when they are unsupervised, and remember that ferrets are great escape artists so ensure their enclosure is well-secured.
- It is important to provide plenty of toys to entertain these intelligent pets. It is however, important to bear in mind that ferrets will easily demolish many pet shop toys, so only sturdy toys should be used. Ferrets can also be trained to wear a harness, and can be taken out to explore, but again do not forget their curious nature.

COMPANIONS

- Ferrets are social animals, so will be happiest in a pair or small group.

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WHAT TO FEED

- Ferrets are true carnivores, and need a high protein, high fat diet which most dog and cat foods cannot provide. It is therefore best to feed a dry complete ferret food. Dry food will help reduce the build up of plaque and dental disease.
- Water should always be freely available and changed daily.

VACCINATIONS

- Ferrets should be routinely vaccinated once a year against distemper. Distemper is a common disease in ferrets, which generally starts with coughing, sneezing and discharges from the eyes and nose and is invariably fatal.

PARASITES

- Ferrets are susceptible to fleas and mites just like cats and dogs. Ear mites are a particularly common problem. Regular parasite treatment may therefore be recommended, depending on your ferret's individual setup.

SIGNS OF ILL HEALTH

- A healthy ferret will be bright and alert with clear open eyes, ears and nostrils. Your ferret should also be keen to eat and drink, and pass faeces regularly.
- It is important to become familiar with your ferret's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage.
- You should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, coat condition or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth
- Hair loss – this may be due to parasites, infection or an underlying disease such as a hormonal problem. This can be a serious concern for your ferret so should be investigated as soon as possible.
- Bleeding or discharges from anywhere should be assessed by your vet
- Limping, change in grooming behaviour or wounds should be assessed by your vet.
- If you have any concerns contact your vet as soon as possible