



Ferrets Sheet

Ferrets have powerful, distinct and engaging personalities, with a playful and fastidious nature. They are very gregarious and are happiest in pairs or larger groups.

Ferrets are half-light creatures with their periods of greatest activity just before sunrise and shortly after sunset. They sleep about eighteen to twenty hours of the day, waking up twice a day for very active periods of about two hours. Due to their very high metabolism, ferrets also awaken roughly every four hours for a few minutes to eat, relieve themselves and play briefly. When they wake, ferrets shiver noticeably for periods up to twenty minutes. This is normal as the ferret is increasing his body temperature after sleep due to his high metabolism and inherently higher body temperature.

As burrow-living animals, ferrets require a dark, quiet place to sleep. The most suitable places are boxes and drawers with bedding of old towels, sweaters, pants and the like in which they can roll up or bury themselves.

Ferrets are extremely curious and will investigate anything and everything. This curiosity is the leading cause of accidents amongst ferrets. It is important to supervise your ferret at all times when he is at play. When you allow your ferrets to roam about your home, never close refrigerators, washers, driers, etc. without first ensuring no ferrets are exploring or roosting within.

The average life span of a ferret is 6 to 8 years.

When fully grown, females weigh about 1.5 lbs.

Ferrets come in many colour variations: Most are shades of brown, gray and black with the mask, feet and tail ("points") generally being the darkest in colour. The red-eyed white breed of ferret, commonly called

an "albino", was bred for the trait of eye colour. These animals suffer from some vision problems due to this breeding, mostly related to difficulties with bright light.

Care Sheet

Housing

Ferrets are active, curious animals that should be allowed to run free when awake and be caged only when required for safety. Should you not be able to allow the animals a large area with toys to roam about freely and explore, then ferrets are not the pet for you.

When it is necessary to confine your pets, they should be kept in a cage large enough to allow separate sleeping, eating, litter and play areas. Generally, a cage of 1 metre by 1/2 metre (40 inches by 20 inches) can house one to three ferrets comfortably for a short period of time or for travel. If confined for too long, they become frustrated and claw or gnaw at the cage, resulting in dental damage. When it is necessary to keep the animals caged, exercise in a large area conducive to exploration for periods of two to three hours twice a day is advised. Remember that a cage is a dangerous place for animals that roughhouse when playing. Make sure that there are no exposed wires, gaps between wires that could catch toes and nails, loose doors or panels that can catch a head, or perch-like shelves that the ferrets can fall from when playing.

Ferrets love to tunnel, so their favourite beddings are sheets, towels, blankets, sweaters and such. These items are ideal for ferrets to snuggle into, but ensure that sweaters and blankets do not have decorations on them that the ferret can pull off and swallow.

SSmall cardboard boxes, bags of plastic and paper, throw rugs and towels, white socks and clean linen: These are some of a ferret's favorite things. Fancy toys are nice for humans, but the child in the ferret enjoys the things he can crawl into, under, and through, like drainage pipe and box lids. The leavings of the latest shopping expedition (bags, boxes, etc.) are the greatest gift mankind can bestow upon a ferret.

Food

Ferrets are exceptionally playful, so expect your ferret to tip over his food and water bowls. Check on them often, tape them down, use a heavy dish or place a rubber mat underneath for spillage.

Do not use water bottles for ferrets: These are unsanitary, damage teeth and do not allow a dehydrating ferret to get enough water to survive. Ferrets also wash their faces in water, so an open source is necessary for their hygiene.

Because ferrets have such rapid metabolisms, they awaken to eat about every four hours. Fresh water and food should always be available to them. Ferrets eat only what they need and leave excess food for later, so one need not worry about over feeding.

Ferrets must be fed a high quality dry ferret or kitten food. Hard food keeps the ferrets teeth clean and makes their feces less smelly. The food should contain from 32% to 36% protein (half of which should be derived from meat), at least 18% fat, minimal ash and the supplement taurine to prevent urinary tract problems. There is no need to change diet for older ferrets. Be aware that some ferret foods contain high quantities of fish meal, oil and by-products. These types of food are based on mink feed and do not meet the nutritional needs of ferrets, who are not aquatic and will shun them (a hint). They are generally soft, causing plaque and tartar buildup on the teeth, and also give the animal an unpleasant smell. Also to be avoided are foods with added flavours or gimmicks, like raisins, to induce the ferret to eat.

Like all carnivores, ferrets enjoy fruit and sweet vegetables such as grapes, bananas, apple, melon, carrots, cucumber, etc. as a dietary complement. Every ferret has it's own preferences. Remove skins that are tougher than a grape peel and slice stringy items like celery into thin slices rather than sticks to avoid intestinal blockages. Dog biscuits (for small dogs) also make a healthy snack. Give dairy products and dried fruits sparingly as ferrets are somewhat lactose intolerant and dried fruit is difficult to digest. Avoid nuts and grain products, as the animals cannot digest these, and treats that could be swallowed whole, as ferrets do not have grinding molars like us. Milk and milk products in small amounts are also acceptable.

Vitamin supplements are not necessary if the ferrets are fed high quality food and fresh fruit. However, many ferrets love Linatone or Ferritone vitamin supplements, which are given as reward for good behavior or a distraction when clipping nails and such. No more than 3 drops per day should be given to your ferret as an excess of certain vitamins can cause medical problems including fur loss and blindness. We recommend feeding fresh fruit rather than using a supplement. Nutri-Cal and

Ferretvite are other supplements used mostly for ill or undernourished ferrets, though they can be used as healthier treats for ferrets instead of Linatone or Ferritone.

Health

Yearly Veterinary Visit

As a ferret year is the equivalent of a decade in a human's life, you will need to take your ferret to your veterinarian two or three times a year for a medical checkup, with yearly vaccinations once a year. Ferrets require yearly inoculations against canine distemper to which they are highly susceptible and it is always fatal. Given the frequency of distemper outbreaks, do not forget to inoculate against this every year!

If your ferret is outside for any length of time or exposed to other animals that are, a rabies vaccination is also suggested. Be aware that proof of a valid rabies inoculation is required when taking your pet across international borders.

Include a dental examination for your pet also. Though ferrets seldom develop cavities, check your ferret's teeth regularly as many ferrets break their fangs when playing. This can cause excruciating pain and make the animal cranky and bitey. Supplementing your ferret's diet with a food formulated to clean teeth and massage gums (e.g. Hill's Prescription Diet Feline T/D) will reduce the likelihood of dental problems. Such foods are available only through veterinarians.

Spaying & Neutering

All ferrets should be fixed before they reach sexual maturity as this will drastically reduce their odour and it will extend their lives. Female ferrets go into heat in their first spring (generally in February) and they will remain in season until successfully mated. If mating does not occur, the females can succumb to aplastic anemia and die a most unpleasant death. You will greatly increase your female ferret's life span if you have her fixed before she goes into season.

As ferrets are very difficult to breed successfully and the risk of losing the jill, her kits or both is very high, the breeding of ferrets should be left to experts with on-site veterinary support.

Ferrets attract mates through the use of pheromones, giving the unaltered animals a very pungent aroma which most people find unpleasant. Unfixed males have a strong musky odour and will mark their territory with urine.

When a ferret is altered (spayed or neutered) its odour will be eliminated almost entirely. Thereafter, bathing when the scent becomes strong (once every month to six months, depending on the weather, activity level, food, etc.) should be all that is required. However, ferrets, like all animals, will retain a slight odour.

Be a responsible pet owner and have your pets neutered or spayed. This increases your pleasure in your pets and makes them more attractive to others.

Odor and De-scenting

One of the most common statements about ferrets is that they have a bad smell. Most of a ferret's odour results from the influence of sex hormones on normal skin secretions. These secretions are drastically reduced when the ferret is altered.

Being distantly related to skunks, ferrets also have anal scent glands that they can release at will, though they rarely spray unless they are fighting, mating or frightened. Descending involves the removal of these scent glands, which are located at the base of the tail. Although ferrets do not need to be descended, if you wish to eliminate the possibility of an unpleasant experience should your pet be frightened in a public place, consider having this done. It is a minor operation roughly equivalent to a human appendectomy in seriousness and discomfort. Your ferret will be back to his active self in two or three days and he will never miss this natural defense. This increases your pleasure in your pet and makes him more attractive to others.

If your ferret is altered and descended and still has a strong odour, the cause is usually the food. Change your ferrets diet - remember, if the food smells bad, so will the animal.

Hygiene

Once your ferret has been fixed and descended, your ferret will require a bath only every few months. Use a good quality "no-tears" human shampoo, preferably with a conditioner, which allows you to wash the ferret from nose to tail without causing any discomfort to the eyes. Be sure to wash around your ferret's neck and face, as there are additional scent glands located on the cheeks.

Intestinal Obstructions

A common cause of premature death in ferrets is the intestinal obstruction. Many ferrets will chew on soft rubber and other small objects. Objects can become lodged in the ferret's intestine, causing an agonizing and slow death unless surgery is performed immediately to remove the obstruction. Many other items can be just as deadly: Doll

feet or hands, erasers, ear plugs, sponges, coffee beans, small buttons, shoe inserts and other foam rubber items, etc. Be careful and use your common sense as you would if you had a toddler at home. Fortunately, most ferrets outgrow this rubber fetish once they have left kithood, but it is best to take no chances.

Do not feed your ferret grain-based foods (breads, cakes, cookies, cereals, noodles, etc.), nuts, or fibrous fruits and vegetables. These items are indigestible to ferrets and can result in various digestive problems, including blockages.

Warning signs of a blockage are listlessness, problems passing a stool, passing a thin and/or mucousy stool, refusal to eat or drink, and vomiting after eating or especially drinking. If you suspect a blockage, take your pet to your veterinarian immediately!

Illnesses

Ferrets can catch the human influenza and cold viruses and they can pass them back. If you have a cold or the flu, be sure to wash your hands before touching your ferret. Keep the ferret away from your face and do your best not to give your cold to your ferret.

Ferrets are also susceptible to canine distemper and rabies (see above). Other common diseases are adrenal and pancreatic tumors, cardiomyopathy, Aleutian disease, bronchial pneumonia and other viral infections. Most can be effectively treated given early diagnosis.

As ferrets tend to deteriorate quickly if they become ill due to their high metabolic rate, it is important to provide proper veterinary care immediately.

Ferrets are dry, temperate climate creatures who suffer from warm temperatures and the damp. They should be kept indoors rather than outside and when the temperature exceeds 20ø C (72ø F) they should be kept in a cool, shaded place with fresh water in bowls. Ferrets do have sweat glands, but their thick fur prevents body cooling by evaporation, making them very susceptible to heatstroke and dehydration. Even if temperatures do not reach such an extreme, the ferrets are often left damp from sweat and sensitive to chills from sudden cooling afterwards. Leave your pets at home with lots of water on hot days.

Info came from

http://www.ferrets.org/Caring_For_Ferrets.htm