

## **FERRET Day to day care and health checking**

Ferrets do require constant care and attention. They appreciate human / owner contact and will get to know you as their carer as they grow.

On a daily basis when you interact with your ferret then check the enclosure for any irregular signs such as diarrhoea. Under normal circumstances your ferret's faeces should be well formed sausage shaped and not loose which form puddles. They can be reflective of new food or treats which have been fed to the ferret so any colouring in the food can show in the ferret's faeces.

Any change in the normal defecation or urination of your ferret that last more than 24-hours should result in a visit to your vet.

Through regular handling it makes weekly and monthly ferret chores much easier.

In the very first instance, claw trimming can appear to be a difficult skill to master and at the start it is advisable to visit your local vet once every 3-4 weeks to have the ferret's claws trimmed. Watch how the vet carries out the task and even ask if you can assist or do one or two claws under their supervision. By putting some cod liver oil or other liquid treat on the belly of the ferret will cause a welcome distraction to the animal whilst you undergo the routine claw trimming.

Before you even attempt to clip your ferret's claws, have a good look at the claw and become familiar with what it looks like. You will notice a red part of the nail that extends from the tow. This is a vein and contains blood. If you clip the claw too short you may cut this vein which is painful to the ferret and will certainly generate noise from the animal. This can appear to be a horrific situation and will cause the ferret to squirm and be very vocal but most minor injuries can be resolved with some direct pressure to the area, the use of styptic powder to help stop the bleeding and a small treat to otherwise occupy your ferret. The owners will very likely need a cup of tea as well because it is a shock to both ferret and human when it happens! If you have managed to clip the vein significantly or the bleeding cannot be stopped after a few minutes then a visit to vet no matter what time of day or night it may be is advised.

Purchase a pair of small animal claw scissors or trimmers; they come in various shapes and sizes. With the ferret distracted hold the paw between finger and thumb with your free hand and work / extend each toe of the ferret in turn. Clip the unwanted claw and discard. When beginning just clip 1 or 2 mm and stay away from the vein. You can always reclip another day if you want and as you build in confidence and familiarity then you will be able to clip one paw in next to no time however don't consider it a race and take your time.

As well as claw trimming it is advisable to check your ferret's ears, eyes and teeth weekly. Pick up your ferret in the normal manner and place it on a raised platform or table where you can have a proper look.

Hold the ferret leaving its back legs supported on the table and lift the edges of the ferret's mouth with your free hand to expose the gums and teeth. As ferrets age they occasionally see a build up in tartar and dental plaque which is usually visible on the gum line of the teeth. If this builds up then it can cause dental decay in the same way it does for humans. A visit to your vet for a dental check-over is worthwhile as part of a yearly check-up. The gums should be pink and clean. Pale gums can be a sign of a possible illness and should be checked over by a vet or experienced ferret handler.

Checking your ferret's ears is as simple as having a quick look inside the outer ear to see if they are clean and that there are no foreign bodies in there. You will find that most ferrets have wax in their ears and this is expected however if that wax is too heavy then it is could be a sign of ear mites. Ferrets do occasionally suffer from ear mites which appear as a very dark brown granular build-up /

deposit in the ear. If your ferret appears to be scratching its ears all the time then look for these mites. If the build up is not excessive then the ears can be cleaned with a cotton wool ball moistened with some tepid / warm water. Place the ball on the other ear and then work slowly in a circular motion with gentle pressure. DO NOT at any point insert anything such as cotton buds into the ear. You will see a brown residue coming away and sticking to the cotton wool ball. If the build up is significant then your vet can prescribe some drops to break down the build up wax and kill the mites.

Whilst it is not advisable to interfere with an animal's eyes, you can simply look at the eye to make sure that it appears healthy and clear. There should be no discharge from the eye however it should not be dry either. The eye itself should be open and clean. DO NOT insert anything into the eye nor shine bright lights into the eye. If you suspect something wrong with the eye then seek veterinary assistance immediately.

As part of your weekly ferret check make sure you pick your ferret up and check for any tenderness around the ferret or possibly identify any lumps or bumps which you may not have seen before. This can be difficult for even an experienced handler but may give you forewarning of any potential issue. With the ferret held in one hand and supported on the table top, run each limb through your fingers and extend it slightly. Limbs should move freely and the ferret should not be in any discomfort when doing this. Be careful with older animals where joint movement might be impaired.

Finally it is advised to keep a history of your ferret's weight as this will help identify what is an average weight for your ferret and will help identify and shift in either weight loss or gain. A cheap pair of digital fishing scales which measure up to 3 kg will be sufficient. Use a cushion cover that you can weigh beforehand (to deduct from the gross weight or reset the scales once the cover is attached) to put your ferret in and then this means the ferret is supported in a dark environment in which it will not feel distressed

Keeping a monthly (or weekly) log of your ferret's condition will familiarise you with your ferret as it gets older.