Food should be fed dry unless there is a medical reason to do otherwise. As ferrets have a short gastrointestinal tract, they need to be fed frequently.

As ferrets have a short gastrointestinal tract, they need to be fed frequently. Sticky, sugar rich cereals and dried fruits can cause plaque and contribute to poor oral health. In the case of cereals, the carbohydrate content is much higher than desirable for these small carnivores. If fed sparingly, or used as a training aid, neither cereals nor dried fruit can cause much harm, particularly if the rest of the diet is complete and sound. For those that worry, or who have ferrets with health problems, meaty treats (poultry, pork, beef) should be substituted.

A ferret should be provided with a secure cage large enough for the ferret to move about and stretch out comfortably. The floor may be tight wire or solid. Ferrets are prone to heat stress in temperatures over 80 degrees, so the cage should allow adequate airflow for cooling. Heavy water bowls or water bottles are recommended because ferrets are known to tip over light containers. Ferrets will use a litterbox, so a litterbox is also advised. When bringing a ferret home, it is not a good idea to let it run free immediately, as there is a greater chance the ferret could be injured in an unfamiliar environment. Be sure to “ferret-proof” the environment by blocking off areas where a ferret could hide or gain access, including the underside of furniture. Avoid exposure of the ferret to foam or latex rubber objects as ferrets like to chew and ingest rubber, which can result in an obstruction.

**Feeding Your Ferret**

Ferrets are carnivores, meaning they are strictly meat eaters! They can only utilize amino acids from meat proteins and cannot digest amino acids from plant proteins. We suggest the use of high-quality ferret foods because they are made up of highly digestible top-quality meat proteins.

When checking the food label, make sure the protein level is 30 percent or more. Some people prefer to mix two or more kinds of high-quality ferret foods together, which is also acceptable.

Ferrets have a high dietary fat requirement (15%-20 percent). A diet with fat content LESS THAN this can lead to a dry brittle coat and itchy skin.

The first two ingredients should NOT be corn. Anything with fish meal will cause odor both in the food AND in your ferret.

**Purchasing a Ferret from A Hobby Breeder**

A hobby breeder may not sell a ferret before it is at least 10 weeks old. The hobby breeder must provide the ferret purchaser with a contract of sale stating that if the ferret purchaser can no longer keep the ferret, it must be returned to the breeder from whom it was purchased. The hobby breeder must take the ferret back without question or conditions placed on the animal’s return. The contract must make it clear that the purchaser cannot sell, surrender, give or otherwise transfer the ferret to anyone except the original breeder.

**Caring for Your Ferret**

Ferrets are from the Mustelid family and are related to minks, otters, weasels and skunks. Their average life span is 5-11 years and they weigh from 1-5 pounds. Baby ferrets are called KITS. Females are called JILLS but when spayed are called SPRITES. Males are called HOBS but when neutered are called GIBS.

Ferrets naturally emit a musky odor. If not descented, they can also produce an odor from their anal glands. The animal will express these glands when it is scared, extremely excited, or has a disease. This odor lasts for a few minutes. Your veterinarian can advise you about whether or not these glands should be removed.

**General Information**

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Common Health Problems of Ferrets
Like all animals, ferrets are susceptible to many different ailments. Below are common diseases seen in ferrets. The list is not all conclusive. Please consult with a veterinarian if you suspect your ferret is ill.

**Adrenal Disease**
Result of estrogen-secreting lesions of the cortex of the adrenal gland commonly resulting in hair loss. Females often have a swollen vulva and males often experience difficulties urinating.

**Aleutian Disease**
Infection from a parvovirus affecting the immune system. Animal may experience weight loss, difficulties walking, convulsions, black stools, and/or difficulties breathing.

**Cardiomyopathy**
Disease of the heart muscle. Animals may experience difficulties breathing, lethargy, coughing, weight loss, anorexia, and/or a fluid-filled abdomen.

**Dental Disease**
Two most common forms by far are periodontal disease and broken teeth.

**Distemper**
Distemper virus results in profound immunosuppression and systemic infections and culminates in death between 25-42 days. Ferrets often have diarrhea and “cold-like” signs.

**Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis (ECE)**
Diarrhea, presumably caused by a coronavirus, that usually develops shortly after introduction to a new, young ferret.

**Gastric Ulcers:** Stress related. Basically, a hole in the lining of the stomach.

**Heartworm Disease**
A parasite that dwells in the heart and blood vessels which is transmitted by mosquitoes.

**Helicobacter Mustelae Infection:** Stomach bacteria that can cause vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, and/or weight loss.

**Inflamatory Bowel Disease (IBD)**
Inflammation of the GI tract resulting in vomiting, diarrhea, and/or weight loss.

**Influenza**
Common problem in ferrets, especially in the winter months. The only species that shares the human flu virus, ferrets suffer much the same signs (sneezing, eye and nasal drainage, anorexia, and lethargy). Thus, influenza can be transmitted from human to ferret and from ferret to human.

**Insulinoma**
Insulin-secreting tumors of the pancreas. Signs may vary from bouts of weakness (especially in the hindlimbs) and lethargy to bouts of collapse where the ferret is minimally responsive.

**Lymphoma (Aka Lymphosarcoma)**
Cancer of lymphocytes, cells that regulate the immune system.

**Proliferate Bowel Disease (PBD)**
Bacterial infection of the GI tract which causes thickening of the intestine. Signs may include weight loss, dehydration, lethargy, and chronic diarrhea.

**Young Children and Animals**
Parents should supervise contact between any animal and young children. If supervision is not possible, parents may wish to consider getting a ferret at a later date. Children should never be left alone with a ferret or any other pet that can potentially injure them.

**Veterinary Care and Vaccinations**
Ferrets should receive routine health examinations from a veterinarian. Your veterinarian can provide you with information on prevention health care, including appropriate vaccinations.

**The Ferret Law**