

Lifespan

With good care the average lifespan is about 6-10 years.

Behaviors

Ferrets should ideally be kept in pairs since they are smart, social, playful animals. They can nip or bite while playing so they should be closely supervised around small children. Ferrets can get along with cats and dogs in some situations however dogs may see them as a prey animal so you should be cautious with other pets in the house. Almost all commercially available ferrets in the US are produced by Marshall farms (indicated by several dots tattooed in the ear) and are already spayed and neutered at the time of purchase.



Vaccinations

The rabies vaccine is legally required for all pet ferrets, like dogs and cats, and is a yearly vaccine. The distemper vaccine is recommended.

Housing

Ferrets need a solid bottom cage (not wire) that is at least four feet long and two feet wide, ideally with multiple levels. Time outside of the cage to explore a safe ferret-proofed area is great enrichment. Water bowls get very dirty so water bottles attached to the side of the cage should be used. Ferrets can be litter box trained. Carefresh bedding (recycled shredded paper) or layers of fleece bedding are the best options to use at the bottom of the cage.

They enjoy time to explore outside of their cage but can be destructive by chewing on household items or eating items that can cause intestinal obstructions. Make sure your ferret is closely supervised if out of its cage and cannot get under/behind any furniture or heavy items. There should be no wires or small objects they can chew/eat. Blankets they can burrow through or tunnels they can hide in and run through are great enrichment items.

Ferrets are notorious for stealing and stashing certain items, and it varies among individuals. Some ferrets will try to steal plush items (slippers, stuffed animals), or rubber items (shoe soles), or plastic (bags), etc.

Diet and Nutrition

Ferrets are obligate carnivores (like cats) and therefore require a high meat protein diet. Quality dry cat or kitten foods are most often used and some commercial ferret foods (made by Zupreem, Mazuri, or Wysong) are available. Food should be available at all times.

Common Illnesses

Influenza virus can affect ferrets as well as humans and can pass back and forth between the two species. Sneezing and nasal discharge are the most common signs and may be accompanied with inappetence and lethargy. Antibiotics are often needed for secondary bacterial infections if these symptoms are seen.

Adrenal Disease is a very common disease in ferrets over 3 years old. The most common clinical sign is hair loss of the tail progressing to the hips, back and towards the head. Vulvar enlargement is very common in spayed females due to an increase in estrogen caused by tumor(s) on the adrenal gland(s). Surgical removal of the tumor is the ideal long term treatment option, however hormone implants that last up to 6 months can be implanted under the skin to control symptoms as well.

Insulinoma is another very common disease in middle age to older ferrets causing low blood glucose levels. Signs include a dazed state, lethargy, weakness, collapse, and even seizures. Low glucose levels often cause nausea which is commonly seen as drooling in ferrets. Insulinoma is caused by a tumor on the pancreas so the best treatment option is surgically removing the tumor, however it can be managed medically to a degree. Any signs of weakness, wobbliness, or nausea should warrant a prompt vet visit.