

Regular Checkups for Good Ferret Health

By Alicia Drakiotes

Here are some things you can check each month to ensure your ferret's good health. This monthly do-it-yourself health check should not take the place of the annual exam done by your veterinarian.



- 1. Keep a record of your ferret's weight.** Since ferrets are small creatures, a weight loss of just a few ounces can mean a drastic drop. (Seasonal weight fluctuations in spring and fall are normal, however.) To weigh your ferret, ask your vet if you can use his or her cat scales for these periodic checks. Most scales made for humans can't measure the small increments in weight loss or gain that could signal that your ferret has a problem.
- 2. Check that coat.** Your ferret's coat should be shiny and glossy, except during coat change seasons. If you notice hair loss that does not grow back within a normal time frame, check with your vet. Also check to make sure your ferret is free of fleas. You may find flea dirt (black specks) in the fur. There are a couple of safe products for flea treatment, such as kitten-safe shampoo containing pyrethrins. There are also topical solutions that can be applied, but they must be dispensed by your vet.
- 3. Check the skin condition.** Is it dry, flaky, or discolored? These changes should be reported to your vet.
- 4. Check your ferret's eyes.** Are they clear and bright? Is there any colored discharge? Watery eyes may indicate an allergy or irritation, perhaps even a cold. If the condition persists, it should be checked by your veterinarian.
- 5. Keep the ears clean.** Ears should be pink and free of odor. If the ears are smelly, or there is dark debris in the ears, have your vet check for ear mites. Left untreated, mites can cause minor infections and other problems.
- 6. Check the color of your ferret's gums.** They should be pink. Pale gums indicate a problem. Gently press a finger against the gums. The pink color should return to them quickly, indicating good blood flow. Also, check the teeth for tartar build-up.
- 7. Check your ferret's breath.** Bad breath can indicate more than tooth and gum problems – it could also be a sign of liver or kidney trouble.
- 8. Check the entire torso for any lumps or bumps.** If you notice anything unusual, contact your veterinarian.
- 9. Check the feet and pads for dryness or cracking.** Older ferrets may have dry foot pads. Applying a small amount of Vaseline to the pads will protect them from cracking and drying, especially in dry winter heat.

10. **Check your ferret's genitalia.** If there is any swelling or signs of irritation, contact your veterinarian.
11. **Be aware of any coughing or gasping.** First, rule out the probability of hair ingestion during shedding season. Then, if either condition persists, see your vet.

If you want more information about ferret health, you can search the database of the Ferret Health List archives at <http://fhl.sonic-weasel.org>. Remember that finding a health problem early can make all the difference in how quickly your ferret recovers. Whenever you observe anything out of the ordinary, contact your veterinarian.

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