

# ferret

## care sheet



Ferrets are affectionate, intelligent small animals that love to play and explore. They are known for their happy, inquisitive nature and humorous behavior.

### facts

average adult size: 15 inches long  
average life span: up to 8 years  
with proper care  
diet: carnivore

*All Petco ferrets have been spayed or neutered and scent glands have been removed.*



**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

### diet

A well-balanced ferret diet consists of:

- High-quality ferret food; ferrets are obligate carnivores.
- Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water, changed daily.
- Do **not** feed chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar, food and treats high in carbohydrates and high-fat treats.

### feeding

Things to remember when feeding your ferret:

- Fresh food and water should always be available.
- A limited amount of ferret treats; remember, treats should not exceed 10% of total food.
- All food given to ferrets 16 weeks or younger should be moistened for easy consumption.

### housing

- Ferrets acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- Ferrets need a large,

multi-tiered, wire-sided habitat with good ventilation, a secure door and a solid floor; openings between the wires should be small enough so the habitat is escape-proof; habitat should also include a hammock, hiding place, litter box and toys. It is best to provide the largest habitat possible.

- 1 to 2" of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not recommended.
- Ferrets are very social and may be kept in pairs or multiples if raised together or introduced correctly. Some younger ferrets tend to be asymptomatic carriers of ECE, Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis, a viral disease that can be fatal if left untreated. Use caution when introducing new ferrets to your home as the new ferret will appear healthy, but other ferrets in the home may become sick within 3 days to 2 weeks. Seek immediate veterinary attention if you suspect your ferret has ECE.
- Different types of small

animals should **not** be housed together.

### normal behavior and characteristics

- Intelligent, playful and mischievous; love to collect and hide household items; love to dig, so be conscious of house plants. Never allow out of habitat unsupervised.
- Some ferrets may communicate by making entertaining noises or by using body language.
- Nipping is a natural behavior to get attention or show defensiveness when awakened.
- Can be litter box-trained.

### habitat maintenance

- Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents at least once a week with a 3% bleach solution. Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the ferret back into the habitat.
- Scoop litter box daily; change bedding at least once a week, or more often as necessary.

### grooming and hygiene

- Monthly baths with ferret shampoo are

recommended, but conditioning sprays can be used in lieu of a bath; ferrets have a natural musky odor that bathing will not remove; outer ears should be cleaned using a cotton ball and ear-cleaning solution.

- All of a ferret's baby teeth should be in by 3 months of age. They will begin losing them as their adult teeth come in, which should happen by the time they are 9 months old.
- Nails should be cut every 2 to 3 weeks. Fur may be brushed daily with a soft brush; ferrets shed their coat twice a year.

### signs of a healthy animal

- Active and social when awake
- Sleeps up to 18 hours per day
- Shiny coat and clear eyes
- Eats and drinks regularly

**Distemper vaccinations are required at 8, 11 and 14 weeks of age; rabies vaccinations are required between 12 and 16 weeks of age. After that time, ferrets require annual vaccinations.**

### red flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Prolapsed rectum
- Overgrown nails
- Dental abnormality

*If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.*

### common health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stools caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or infectious organisms.	Consult with a veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Ear mites	Parasite that causes itching and brownish discharge in ears.	Consult a veterinarian for treatment.
Upper respiratory infection	Symptoms include crusty eyes, nasal discharge and labored breathing.	Consult with a veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.
Adrenal gland disorder	Loss of hair; cause unknown.	Consult with a veterinarian.

## shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- High-quality ferret food
- Ferret treats
- Bedding
- Food bowl/water bottle
- Hideaway place
- Toys
- Hammock
- Litter pan/litter
- Indoor playpen
- Harness and leash
- Soft brush and nail clippers
- Shampoo
- Styptic powder
- Book about ferrets

## sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on ferrets and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all small animals are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, Rat Bite Fever and *Salmonella*, and because ferrets are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as cold and flu (including H1N1), always wash your hands before and after handling your small animal or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Go to [cdc.gov/healthypets](http://cdc.gov/healthypets) and [petco.com/caresheet](http://petco.com/caresheet) for more information about small animals and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to [petco.com](http://petco.com) for more information.

