

Ferret care

Ferrets can make great pets; they are playful, social and inquisitive, but they have certain needs that need to be met for them to live a healthy life. Life span of a ferret is on average 6-9 years.

Housing

- A wire cage provides a temporary home for your ferret. Bedding should be provided with blankets, fleece and pillowcases that ferrets like to snuggle and sleep in. Hammocks, tunnels, and boxes should also be available in the cage.
- A cage should be cleaned out completely at least once weekly and spot-cleaned daily.
- Ferrets prefer temperate climates and are prone to heat stress. They should not be housed in areas that become hot.
- Ferrets can be toilet trained. A corner litter tray can be filled with recycled paper cat litter.
- Opportunities for exercise and play time outside the cage should be provided daily. This is essential for physical and mental health. If given free roam of the house, ferrets need supervision. It is important to **ferret-proof your home** as ferrets tend to chew on and ingest small items (including rubber and plastic), electric cords, medicines and can escape through very small holes.
- **Enrichment** in the form of tunnels, boxes and climbing towers/frames should be provided. Small food items, such as dry food pieces, can be hidden throughout. This encourages exercise, exploration, foraging and playing.
- Exposure to **natural day/night cycles** should be provided.

Diet

- Ferrets are **obligate carnivores**, requiring a high-protein, high-fat, low-carbohydrate, and low-fibre diet. In nature, they eat whole small prey animals. Rather than gorging, they eat small amounts frequently.
- **High-quality ferret or kitten food** should be available at all times.
- Pet ferrets can also be offered frozen thawed rodents (mice and rats), providing a **whole prey food item**.
- Small amounts of human-grade raw meat can also be offered.
- Water should be available from a bowl (heavy-based ceramic bowls are less likely to be tipped over).

Handling

- Ferrets are very playful. Their playing can be rough and some can play-nip. It is important to teach a ferret not to nip when playing with people.

Health care

- Newly acquired ferrets should be checked by a vet. Annual check-ups are recommended thereafter.
- Discuss with your vet the requirements for desexing (surgical desexing or chemical desexing), vaccination and parasite control.
- Female ferrets can remain in heat, which can be life-threatening. It is important to discuss this with your vet before your female ferret reaches puberty.