

HOW TO

Test Your Ferret's Blood Glucose

These step-by-step instructions show how to home-test a ferret's blood glucose.

BY KATHY FRITZ

PHOTOS BY KATHY & BARRY FRITZ

Your ferret has been diagnosed with insulinoma. Now what? No matter what course of action you and your veterinarian take (surgery, medical management or a combination of the two), learning how to take your ferret's blood glucose at home is an invaluable skill in managing the disease. Home testing can be less stressful on you as well as your ferret and a more consistent tracking of glucose levels can be achieved.

Human glucometers are readily available at most drug stores or pharmacies. Choose a meter that requires the smallest blood sample. The FreeStyle Lite glucometer by Abbott Laboratories requires only 0.3 microliters. Abbott Laboratories has also come out with the AlphaTRAK Blood Glucose Monitoring System specifically tested and calibrated for use in dogs, cats and ferrets. This meter also requires a very

small amount of blood (0.3 microliters).

"The AlphaTRAK glucometer gives a very accurate measurement of the glucose level similar to results from a large commercial veterinary lab," said Jerry Murray, DVM, of Dallas, Texas. "I highly recommend using this meter because it gives a more accurate reading than human glucometers. Plus, it is quick and easy to use." The system can be purchased through your veterinarian.

No matter what meter you choose, the steps are basically the same in taking the sample. Before testing, read the manual carefully because each meter may vary. Once you feel comfortable with your meter, it is time to test. Using the meter is easier each time. Don't get discouraged if you are not successful with the first try. It takes time and practice to become comfortable with the procedure.

If you choose to home-test your ferret's blood glucose, you must work closely with your veterinarian. Take your meter with you to each visit, and ask your vet to sample using his or her meter along with yours. By calibrating both meters with the same blood sample, you and your veterinarian can adjust the results accordingly. When testing at



STEP 1: GATHER SUPPLIES

Double-check the list before going on to the next step.

- ✓ Glucometer
- ✓ Sterile lancets and device
- ✓ Test strips
- ✓ Petroleum jelly
- ✓ Cotton balls
- ✓ Rubbing alcohol
- ✓ Small towel
- ✓ Ferretone

STEP 2: PREPARE YOUR FERRET

Keep your pet comfortable and distracted. To do this, place the towel on your lap and lay your ferret on its back on top of the towel. Put a small amount of Ferretone on your pet's tummy. Once your ferret is distracted by the Ferretone, move on to Step 3.

home if a reading is low (or high), call your veterinarian to see if your ferret's medication should be adjusted.

The time invested to learn home testing can help your ferret lead a healthier life through the course of this disease. Any action by ferret owners that can add to the quality of their pet's life is worth doing. *

Kathy Fritz is the executive director for the Ferret Nook Shelter/Adoption Center in Cambridge, Wis. She has cared for and sheltered ferrets for 20 years.



STEP 3: PREPARE THE SAMPLE SITE

I find it easiest to choose a hind toe pad. First, clean the toe pad using the rubbing alcohol on a cotton ball. After the area has dried, massage the toe to bring the blood to the surface (the skin becomes a darker pink). Spread a very small amount of petroleum jelly on the pad. This thin coat of petroleum jelly keeps stray hairs from interfering and helps the blood to form a bead.

STEP 4: PREP THE METER

Place a test strip in your meter. Do not turn on the meter until you collect the sample (Step 6). Sometimes meters automatically turn off before you're ready with the sample.



STEP 5: THE PUNCTURE

Using the lancet device set per the manufacturer's instructions, puncture the toe pad so a small bead of blood forms. It takes practice to know what setting is best for your ferret. I use the lancet instead of the lancing device. Sometimes the click

made by the lancet device startles a ferret and the sample is lost. If this happens, start over at Step 3. By using just the lancet to puncture the toe pad, there is less risk of startling your ferret and having to repeat the process.



STEP 6: OBTAIN THE SAMPLE

Turn on the meter (usually by pressing the M). When the meter is ready to accept the sample, a flashing droplet (or similar symbol) shows on the display. Gently touch one edge of the test strip to the bead of blood, making sure not to rub up against the skin. Most glucometers beep when enough blood has been drawn into the meter. After the blood has been drawn, gently press a clean cotton ball on the toe pad. If you can't get a sample try later – a stressed ferret may give incorrect results. Also, check your lancet. It may need to be replaced.



STEP 7: RECORD THE RESULTS

After 5 to 15 seconds (depending on the brand of meter) the results are displayed. Record your results either in the log book that comes with the meter or on a separate piece of paper that can be placed in your ferret's personal folder. You're finished. That's all there is to it. Give your ferret a little extra Ferretone for being such a great sport!



Glad we're finished, I deserve a nap!