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While most people are aware of the common illnesses affecting cats and dogs, the medical problems of ferrets aren't as well known. There are a number of them, and being aware of the disease processes, treatment, and prevention will make you a better-equipped guardian of your feisty little friend.

Among the most serious diseases of the ferret is distemper, a viral disease that is typically fatal. It causes crusting and discharge from the nose and mouth, coughing, and neurological signs.

**Ferrets are very susceptible to the human flu, and just like us, they will develop signs of sneezing, eye discharge, nasal discharge, lethargy, and poor appetite.**

Ferrets catch distemper by inhaling viral particles emitted in the air by other ferrets with the infection. Vaccination is the best prevention of the disease, especially in households with many ferrets or those households that intend to bring in new ferrets.

Another respiratory disease of ferrets is "flu" or influenza virus. Ferrets are very susceptible to the human flu and just like us, they will develop signs of sneezing, eye discharge, nasal discharge, lethargy, and poor appetite. The way to treat the flu is to offer enticing foods and plenty of water. For more serious cases,

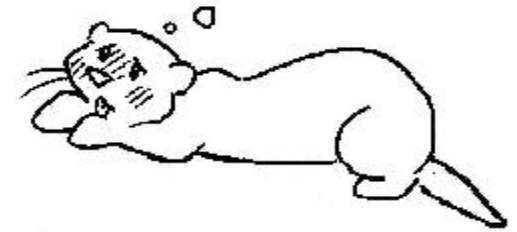
veterinarians may prescribe a cough suppressant or even administer fluids in the hospital.

Parasites can be a pretty bad problem for a ferret. As a general rule, ferrets are susceptible to most of the same external parasites as the dog and cat; this includes fleas, mites (both ear and skin), and ticks. Ear mites are particularly common in ferrets, and if you have cats and/or dogs in the house as well, you can end up with a mighty mite problem. Affected ferrets will typically have thick dark brown discharge present in their ears. To diagnose this condition, veterinarians perform cytological examination of the discharge; the treatment is topical medication. Ferrets can also get fungal and bacterial infections of the skin, and in rare cases, ferrets can get intestinal parasites, which the vet will discover upon performing a fecal examination.

Older ferrets have their own set of health worries, and of them, dental disease is at the top of the list. Problems can include tartar, gingivitis, periodontal disease, and chipped or broken teeth. To help reduce the incidence of dental disease, owners should feed their ferrets dry and semi moist foods. It's also very important that you take your ferret to the vet regularly for dental scaling and polishing; the veterinarian also can extract teeth if necessary.

Ferrets also can suffer from heart disease, particularly dilated cardiomyopathy. This is a problem that results in dilation of the chambers of the heart. Affected ferrets often are lethargic,

lose weight, and may have difficulty breathing. Many of the same cardiac medications that are given to people, dogs, and cats are also used in the treatment of heart disease in the ferret. Ferrets are also susceptible to heartworm disease, although this is relatively uncommon.



Ferrets of all ages can suffer from cancer. Insulinoma is the most common type of tumor found in older ferrets (three to eight years of age). In younger ferrets, the most common type of tumor is lymphoma, which can involve various tissues and organs in the body. Insulinomas are tumors of the pancreas, the organ responsible for producing insulin, the hormone in the body that helps to regulate blood sugar. In affected ferrets, the tumor causes an increase in insulin secretion and thereby causes a drastic reduction in blood glucose. Affected ferrets may collapse, seem weak or lethargic and may salivate. Treatment involves either medical or surgical management of the disease.

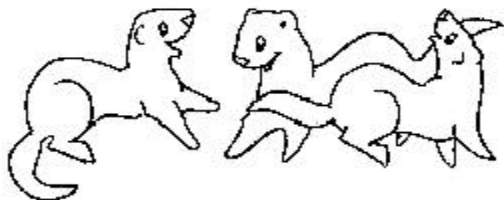
Adrenal disease, which can cause hair loss, is also common in ferrets; if you've ever seen a bald ferret, this is the likely culprit. There are medical and surgical approaches to treatment.

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Many ferrets are found to have enlarged spleens (splenomegaly) on physical examination. This can be a normal finding in some healthy ferrets...or, it may be caused by an underlying disease. Diseases or problems that can cause splenomegaly include insulinoma, adrenal disease, lymphoma, ingestion of a foreign object, and cardiac disease.

**Talk to your veterinarian to learn more about what you can do to keep your ferret healthy.**

Like all living creatures, ferrets are not immune to illness, but with proper preventative care, nutrition, and husbandry, they make great pets. Talk to your veterinarian to learn more about what you can do to keep your ferret healthy.



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# Diseases of the Ferret



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