# FERRET INFORMATION BOOKLET

Animal Haven Veterinary Center

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# ANIMAL HAVEN VETERINARY CENTER

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**Welcome to Animal Haven Veterinary Center**. We are a full-service mobile veterinary hospital utilizing modern equipment and techniques to provide complete healthcare for your pet. We have X-ray capabilities, complete surgical service using the safest gas and injectable anesthetics available, complete laboratory diagnostics, and a wide array of pet healthcare products and foods. We also have the option for referral to local specialists when needed. We are extremely excited about creating our new veterinary center and a unique way of providing complete care – in our mobile medical unit!!!

**Your pet's health and well being is our primary concern**. We believe that our role is to advise and educate you as the owner of all available options for your pet's needs, both from the aspect of preventative medicine as well as care for patients who are ill and need diagnosis and treatment of disease. To support this belief, we try to provide you with handouts that detail specific conditions we may have diagnosed your pet with and procedures (such as bloodwork) we may have done or recommended for your pet. We feel this will better enable you to have an understanding of what we are doing and allow you to understand and more fully participate in your pet's health and veterinary care. We will strive to resolve your pet's problems in a timely and cost-effective manner while minimizing discomfort and providing compassionate care for your family's friend.

**Communication between our doctors, staff, you, and the pet is essential.** We try very hard to keep you informed of our findings, the options which may be recommended and available for care, potential costs, and what might be expected in the future. We work hard to answer your questions and concerns promptly. Our mobile unit was created with the sole purpose of providing the best healthcare for your pet, and to deliver this care with excellent customer service. Your ideas play an important role in defining what services we offer today, and what services we will add in the future. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or make us aware of your thoughts, concerns and suggestions of how we may better serve you and your pet's needs We cannot know them unless you tell us.

**Dr. Nancy Brady** grew up in Johnstown, PA, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in 1995. She practiced at the Glasgow Animal Hospital and Animal Veterinary Center before starting Animal Haven Veterinary Center. She is married and has 3 children (twin daughters and a son), 3 cats, and 2 Shih Tzu's. She loves being a mom, enjoys her demanding role raising her 3 children, and is thankful for the immense rewards that this

important task brings. Also, she is extremely grateful to have an understanding, caring, and supportive husband who encourages her veterinary career and helps balance it with her family life. Dr. Brady has an interest in marine mammal medicine and volunteers her time to the Delaware stranding response efforts - going to rescue and/or work-up cases of dolphin, seal, and whale strandings in Delaware. She also enjoys photography, volleyball, and doing crafts.

**Dr. Charlotte Fagraeus** graduated from Cornell Veterinary School in 1994, having previously graduated from Duke University with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and a Bachelor of Arts in comparative literature. She grew up in many different places, starting in Stockholm, Sweden then North Carolina, Oklahoma, and finally in Delaware. She worked at Kirkwood Animal Hospital and Animal Veterinary Center before starting Animal Haven Veterinary Center. She is not married, but has four "children" of the four-legged variety (2 cats, a Rottweiler, and a Standard Schnauzer). Her personal interests include traveling, skiing, gardening, and spending time with friends and family. She loves making a possible difference in the lives of people and animals and hopes to continue doing so with Animal Haven Veterinary Center.

## Making An Appointment

**Our office hours are 8 AM to 8 PM on Monday thru Friday and 8AM until 2 PM on Saturday.**

**In order to maximize your visit with us** during any home visit, please have your pets ready and waiting, leashed, or crated.

**If you cannot keep a scheduled appointment**, please notify us 24 hours in advance if at all possible. This will allow us to schedule another patient that needs our care. We realize that unexpected circumstances in your life can come up and 24 hour notice is not always possible. Please still give us a call to let us know you won't be able to keep your appointment so that we can see a last-minute emergency or sick patient.

**We will always try to make appointments with a specific doctor if you prefer**. There may be times when that doctor's schedule is full or not in the office on the day you prefer. You may choose to wait for an appointment with your preferred doctor or you are free to see another doctor. You will need to let the receptionist know if you request an appointment with a specific doctor.

**Currently, we handle after-hour emergencies by having you call one of several hospitals in the area that offer 24-hour care**. These hospitals are: **Animal Emergency Hospital (phone number = 610-494-6686) , Windcrest Animal Hospital (phone number = 302-998-2995), or VCA Newark Animal Hospital (phone number = 302-737-8100).** Animal Emergency Hospital is located in Aston, PA and is truly an emergency facility open only during the evening, weekends, and holidays and is approximately 20-25 minutes from our facility. Windcrest Animal Hospital has doctors on-site after hours for emergency and critical care and is located approximately 20 minutes from our facility on Lancaster Pike in Wilmington. VCA Newark Animal Hospital is a facility that has doctors on-call during evenings, weekends, and holidays and is approximately 15 minutes from our facility. If you do not feel your pet needs to be seen immediately, you can leave a message on our voice mail and we will return your call and/or schedule an appointment the following business day.

# General Ferret Facts

Ferrets have a lifespan of about 5-11 years and can range in weight from 2 to 5 months, with males being slightly larger than females. Ferrets reach their adult size by 6 months of age. They have a normal weight fluctuation whereby weight is gained in the fall and then lost in the spring. This weight variation can be a 15 to 40% fluctuation and is greater in animals that have not been neutered.

Ferrets are very flexible and can turn their bodies in a "U" shape. A common method of restraining a ferret is called "scruffing" and is done by grasping the skin across the back of its neck. Although this may seem an uncomfortable position to you, it actually has a calming effect on your ferret and keeps him/her from squirming and injuring itself during times when he/she needs to be still (such as during a veterinary examination).

Ferrets can usually share a household where there is dogs and cats with little difficulty. However, ferrets have been known to attack pet birds, so appropriate precautions should be taken if there is a pet bird in your house.

Ferrets can be "nippy" or "mouthy" just like a puppy, but may often do so a little more enthusiastically!!! Just like puppies, you must train your ferret that this is not appropriate. When your ferret is being mouthy (nipping, playing rough), you can gently place your hand around its nose/muzzle to close it and say "No bite". Replace the object the ferret is inappropriately chewing on with an appropriate chew toy. If the inappropriate biting/chewing continues, you should stop interacting and contact with the completely by giving the ferret a "time-out". The ferret should be put in a quiet cage by itself (a separate small carrier that you would use when taking it in the car can work well). Leave the ferret for a short period of time (2-3 minutes) and then bring him/her back with you and try again. There is **NEVER** a place for physical punishment. **Positive reinforcement and praise are key to the bonding process between you and your new pet**. We cannot stress enough that physical punishment (swatting with hand/newspaper or flicking it on the nose) will only cause your pet to be fearful of you and possibly even cause aggression. Positive reinforcement, on the other hand, will make your pet a better life-long companion.

# Litterbox Training

Ferrets can be litter box trained. A small low-sided box should be placed in a consistent area of the cage and away from the sleep and feeding areas. You can use kitty litter, but should avoid heavy "perfumed-smelling" ones as ferrets often do not like them. Unlike most cats, ferrets often do not cover up their waste so it is necessary that you clean out the box frequently to minimize odor. If you allow your pet to be loose in the house, you should leave the cage door open so that he/she can enter its cage to go potty and you should also leave a litter box out in any room that you allow your ferret to play in.

# Housing

It is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that your ferret BE KEPT IN ITS CAGE when you are not home or able to closely supervise him/her in order to prevent any tragic accidents (such as chewing on electrical lines, etc). Ferrets should be kept indoors in a minimum cage size of 24" wide x 24" deep x 18" high for up to 2 ferrets. The sides should be wire with holes no bigger than 1.0" X 0.5" (to prevent them from squeezing out) and the floor may be either wire or solid metal. Do not use wood flooring as this is hard to clean and retains odors! Aquariums are NOT suitable cages for ferrets because they do not allow appropriate ventilation. Your ferrets cage can be made into a creative play area by using PVC pipe or cardboard boxes. A private sleep area is necessary to prevent your ferret from becoming frustrated (which may cause constant digging at the cage). This may be created by simply leaving a small towel or baby blanket in the cage for your ferret or you can purchase hammocks and ferret beds from a pet store. The basic point is that ferrets love a quiet and private place to snuggle into when they sleep!

Ferrets like to chew and will often swallow pieces of things. Make sure to ferret-proof your home and remove access to things that he/she may be able to chew and beak off/eat small pieces of – especially anything rubber. If your ferret ingests anything like this (such as a small piece of rubber), it could get lodged in their stomach or intestines and cause an obstruction which could result in serious illness and possibly, death. Safe toys to give to ferrets are ones made from very hard plastic or of cardboard. Such things include ping pong balls, golf balls, paper towel or toilet paper cardboard rolls, PVC pipe, and paper bags. You should also make sure that you check for and plug up/close any holes that a ferret could get into and either get stuck or escape through.

Ferrets lack sweat glands and have difficulty maintaining a normal body temperature in extremely warm/hot weather. Ferrets should always have access to fresh water and a shady area. If the temperature rises above 90 degrees F, heat stroke and possibly even death can occur. On really hot days, you can spray your ferret with a water bottle to help keep its body temperature low.

## Nutrition and Feeding

Ferrets are carnivores (meat-eaters) and have a poor ability to digest complex carbohydrates and fiber and they cannot utilize plant proteins. Cat food was once thought to be a suitable diet for ferrets, but many grocery brand cat foods have cereal or plant proteins in their formulation making them inappropriate for ferrets. However, premium foods (such as Iams or Science Diet) have meat proteins in them and are thus appropriate foods to feed a ferret. For ferrets under 3 years of age, the kitten formula is best and after 3 years of age, the adult/maintenance cat formula is preferred. There are also ferret foods available which are also appropriate. A protein content between 30-40% is best, but kidney disease may result if a ferret is fed food with a protein content of greater than 40%.

Ferrets also have a high fat requirement and the diet should contain 20 to 30% fat. Some ferrets may develop brittle skin, especially during the winter months when heaters are in use and therefore, may require using a fatty acid supplement to improve their coat. This can be discussed more with you should the need arise in your pet.

Table food can be offered to ferrets in small quantities and should be limited to cooked meat, fish, and poultry. Bones and foods containing bones should NOT be fed to ferrets because the bones are likely to injure the stomach and/or intestinal tract and may cause your pet to require surgery or to develop a serious infection, which may result in death. A ferret can develop diabetes if it is fed a diet high in refined sugars. DO NOT feed your ferret sugar-coated/layden treats (such as cookies or cereals), cakes, ice cream, raisins, etc. Ferrets also do not tolerate fiber well, so high fiber foods should be avoided. However, fruits or vegetables in very small amounts (NO MORE THAN one teaspoon total per ferret per day) are not harmful to them. Failure to not avoid fiber in your ferrets diet could lead to stomach or intestinal bloating or obstruction, which requires surgery and is life-threatening.

Ferrets should have fresh WATER ALWAYS AVAILABLE. A water bottle is usually best to keep it clean and to avoid your ferret from playing in it and tipping it over. But, some ferrets will not use a water bottle and want their water in a bowl. In these cases, a heavy bowl is best to try to limit your ferret's ability to flip it over!!! If your ferret is being fed the above recommended diets, additives and vitamin supplements in the water are NOT necessary and can often even add to the chance of the water developing a bacterial overgrowth.

# Vaccinating Your Ferret

1) **Canine Distemper** (see "Ferret Diseases" below) should be part of every ferret's regular vaccine protocol because this disease is nearly always fatal. The vaccine should be started between 6 to 8 weeks of age (and can be started as early as 4 weeks of age if the mother was not current on this vaccine). Boosters are then given every 3 to 4 weeks until the ferret becomes 16 weeks old, with boosters given yearly. Previously unvaccinated adult ferrets should receive an initial series of two vaccines given 3 to 4 weeks apart with boosters given yearly.

2) **Rabies** (see "Ferret Diseases" below) vaccine is recommended and is even required in most states. The first rabies vaccine should be given at 12 weeks of age with yearly boosters given thereafter.

# Ferret Diseases

**Distemper** is a disease with a near 100% fatality rate for ferrets. Early symptoms of the disease can present as an upper respiratory or eye infection, having a discharge from the eye which may be clear at first, but usually progresses to a thick yellow or green discharge that is unresponsive to medications. As time progresses, the ferret becomes lethargic, depressed, and loses its appetite. The illness quickly progresses and symptoms often include coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, facial swelling, and skin rsches/crusting. Soon signs of the disease attacking the nervous system are evident and may include incoordination, blindness, and seizures. Diagnosis of the disease is often based on the clinical symptoms but more definitive diagnosis can be made with blood tests. Treatment of this disease is targeted at supportive care only as there is no cure for this disease. Death results in more than 99% of cases.

**Rabies** is a viral disease that infects the central nervous system of all mammals, including humans. It causes altered behavior (friendly pet may turn aggressive, or shy animal may become more friendly), incoordination, seizures, progressive paralysis, and eventually death. It is usually spread in the saliva, following a bite or through a cut in the skin. Vaccination is the best way to control rabies in our pets. Any mammal exposed to rabies has a risk of contracting the disease and veterinarians have federal and state regulations we must follow regarding rabies and animal-related bites (both bites to humans and other animals.) Any person exposed to rabies must undergo a prophylactic treatment and there is no known cure for the disease. This is a disease where an intense responsibility is present—you have an obligation to protect your family, neighbors, and pets by having your pet appropriately vaccinated against rabies.

**Urinary Stones** either in the kidney or the bladder can cause serious problems. Males and females seem to be equally affected. Signs may include: bloody urine, inability to urinate, a swollen and or painful belly, vomiting, lethargy, and/or inappetance. Surgery is usually necessary to remove the stones, although a prescription diet may eliminate specific types of stones or prevent their recurrence.

**Lymphoma** is a form of cancer that is relatively frequently diagnosed in ferrets. Symptoms of the disease vary depending upon which organs are affected, but typically include anorexia, lethargy, fever, weight loss, abdominal organ (liver and spleen) enlargement and enlarged lymph nodes. Diagnostic tests such as x-rays and bloodwork are performed in the process of diagnosing this disease. Lymphoma can be treated with chemotherapy and ferrets often tolerate the chemotherapy well and some ferrets can have remission from the disease for months to years. The disease will often usually come out of remission eventually and result in the death of the patient.

**Insulinoma is the most common type of cancer diagnosed in ferrets. It is a cancer of the pancreas and it causes an overproduction of insulin, which results in low blood sugar levels in the ferret. The low sugar levels causes the brain to not function properly and the ferret begins to act strangely, like staring into space or hard to wake up. As the disease becomes more severe, symptoms begin to become more evident and may include: drooling, pawing at the mouth, coma-like episodes, and/or seizures. The ferret can also die with low blood sugar levels. Diagnosis is based upon testing your ferret's blood sugar levels. Treatment depends on the stage of the disease, but surgery is usually recommended to remove the tumor as long as the disease is not too progresses and the ferret is otherwise healthy. If surgery is not an option, dietary control of the disease can be successful. If you should notice any of the symptoms listed above, you should have your pet examined as soon as possible by a veterinarian. If you find your ferret in a coma-like state or having a seizure, you can try to bring your pet out of this by giving it some honey and water by mouth until he/she is active and alert and has stopped the abnormal activity. Then, give him/her some of its normal food and contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.**

**Adrenal Tumors** are almost as common as insulinomas and can commonly occur along with it. The adrenal glands are pea-sized organs located near the kidneys and they produce hormones that help to control metabolism. The tumors can either be non-cancerous or cancerous and the tumor can infect one or both glands. The symptoms include: hair loss over just a portion or all of the body (hair loss may be intermittent with periods of regrowth), dry and/or brittle hair, skin that seems to be "thin", a pot-belly which results from thinning/weakness of the muscles, increased drinking, and increased urination. The treatment of choice is surgical removal of the affected anal gland. But, if the disease is too advanced, both adrenal glands or other diseases make surgery not possible, then medical treatment is possible.

**Skin Tumors** are not uncommon in ferrets. The most common type is called mast cell tumor. It usually presents as a round, red, raised bump. It is usually itchy and may bleed (especially if the ferret scratches it). The other most common tumor is called a sebaceous gland adenoma and it usually presents as a "wart-like" growth. These often bleed easily and will often become cancerous. The general recommendation for skin masses/bumps/lumps of ferrets is to have them surgically removed because they are often very irritating to the ferret and they can often become cancerous.

**Fatal Anemia of Females** is a condition that occurs in unspayed female ferrets caused by the estrogen released during her heat cycle damaging the bone marrow's ability to produce red blood cells. Symptoms of the disease are often not present until the red blood cells reach such a low level that the disease is irreversible and death results. But, this condition can be prevented by having your female ferret spayed (recommended by the age of 6 months). If you wish to breed your female ferret, but do not want to do so during a particular heat cycle, then a hormone injection can be given by the veterinarian to temporarily stop the heat cycle. However, over time, these injections can also cause illness in your ferret and should therefore NOT be used instead of spaying.

**Colds/Flu** are very easily transmitted to ferrets. Ferrets will develop the same symptoms as humans (runny nose, watery eyes, coughing, sneezing, and anorexia). And, just like in humans, time is the only cure for them (rest for 5 to 7 days). More serious viral flu infections may require supportive care and/or antibiotics to treat any secondary bacterial infections. Symptoms of a more serious viral flu infection may include refusal to eat, a yellow or green nasal and/or eye discharge, or severe lethargy. If any of these more severe symptoms are seen, please make an appointment to have your ferret examined by the veterinarian.

**Hairballs** are a fairly common problem with ferrets, especially after the age of 2 years old. Although ferrets can vomit, they often to not do so when they have hairballs and over time, the hairball can become large enough to cause intestinal blockage (which may require surgical removal). It is much easier and safer to prevent hairballs by giving your ferret a medicine that helps to lubricate the hairball to help it pass in the feces. This medicine (called Laxatone) is NOT a laxative (so it will not cause diarrhea), but simply a lubricant that coats the outside of the hairball to make it move through the intestinal tract. It is a malt-like paste that most ferrets love to eat!!!! We recommend giving a strip of the paste about one inch long to your ferret daily (he or she will probably believe it to be a yummy treat).

**Heartworm disease** is spread to your ferret by mosquitoes and can be found everywhere in the United States. After biting another infected animal, the mosquito carries a microscopic baby form of the heartworm. When the mosquito takes a bloodmeal from your ferret, it injects the baby worm into your pet. Over the next several weeks and months, the baby worm goes through a series of life stages. After about 5-6 months the baby worms have become adults that are up to 14 inches long and live in your ferret's heart and major arteries of the lungs. Because of the small size of a ferret's heart, even an infection with only one worm can cause serious disease. Clinical signs are often very vague and may include coughing, difficulty breathing, lethargy, anorexia, bloody stools, exercise intolerance/tiring easily, fainting, and/or weakness. Sometimes, clinical signs are not even present and "sudden death" is the only evidence of a ferret that was infected. Detection of the disease with most of the blood tests used on dogs do not detect the disease in ferrets and treatment of the disease can be very difficult. It is therefore HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that ferrets be put on a heartworm preventative. Unlike dogs but similar to cats, a blood test is not required prior to starting heartworm preventative. The heartworm preventative is available as a liquid (called Ivermectin) or in a chewable treat for (called Heartguard). Whichever medicine is used, you will give the medicine to your pet once every 30 days and it should be used year-round.

**Cardiomyopathy** is a condition which affects mostly male ferrets over 3 years of age. With this disease, the muscle of the heart walls become thickened, which reduces the size of the inner chambers and decreases the ability of the heart to pump adequate quantities of blood to the rest of the body. Symptoms may include: fatigue, exercise intolerance, inappetance, fainting, and/or difficulty breathing. The disease is diagnosed with chest x-rays, Electrocardiogram (ECG), and/or an ultrasound of the heart. All ferrets older than 3 years of age should have routine screening done to check for this disease.

## Intestinal Parasites

Intestinal parasites can infect ferrets. Routine testing (called fecals) of your pet's feces at our office can detect the parasites and medications to rid your pet of them can be dispensed. When we do a fecal, we are looking for the microscopic evidence of the parasites that are shed into your pet's feces. We recommend two negative fecals in a row at 4-week intervals in new or young pets to ensure the pet is intestinal parasite-free. After your pet has two negatives in a row, a yearly fecal should be done to ensure that your pet did not have a dormant stage of an infection that has become active.

The three most common intestinal parasites found in ferrets are:

1) **Coccidia** are intestinal parasites that are actually not worms but rather a single-celled organism called protozoans. They can cause diarrhea, weight loss, and/or anorexia. Some animals show no symptoms at all until infections become very progressed. Treatment includes giving your pet either a pill or a liquid by mouth once daily for 10 days in a row. A fecal should be done at 4 and 8 weeks following the initial diagnosis of coccidia in order to ensure that all worms have been cleared from your pet.
2) **Giardia** is a single-celled organism that invades the intestinal tract. We diagnose them by looking at a smear of your pet's feces under the microscope. If diagnosed with this, we will put your ferret on a medicine that you will give to him/her by mouth once or twice daily for approximately 10 days.

3) **Cryptosporidium** is an infection by an organism similar to coccidian. There is no treatment for this infection. Symptoms include anorexia, depression, and yellowish diarrhea. An infected ferret may not show any illness and can cause a ferret to become suddenly ill, especially if the ferret becomes stressed or the immune system becomes suppressed by another illness. Prevention and treatment are the best means of controlling this illness. A fecal exam should be done on any new ferret and a new ferret should not be introduced into a household with other ferrets until after a 2 weeks "quarantine" to ensure the animal is not infected with this parasite. Appropriate sanitation, which includes frequent removal of fecal material from the litter pan/cage dramatically reduces the ability for this disease to become a problem.

## About Fleas and Controlling Them

**The flea has a lifespan of 6-12 months**. Each female flea can lay up to 2000 eggs at a time!!! Fleas actually spend about 80% of their time off your pet, only hopping on him/her to take a blood meal. Therefore, if treatment is only directed at the pet, the flea problem will be more difficult to control.

**The life cycle of the flea takes 4 steps**. The adult female lays eggs that become larva. The larva then becomes a pupa encased in a cocoon. Finally the pupa becomes an adult. The eggs, larval and pupal stages of the life cycle are not affected by baths and dips, and are often very difficult to eliminate with sprays and foggers, especially if allowed to progress to the pupal stage, which can stay dormant in adverse environments for very long time periods.

**To determine if your pet has fleas, use a flea comb or fine-toothed barber's comb to survey your pet's coat for fleas or flea dirt**. The tines of a flea comb are small enough to trap fleas and flea dirt. If you catch a flea, you can kill it by dipping the comb in soapy water. Flea dirt looks like dark black specks of "dirt", but it is really dried blood left behind by feeding fleas. You should comb your ferret over a white towel or blanket so that you can see the dark fleas and flea dirt easier. You can often also diagnose fleas in a heavy flea infested environment by placing a flat dish of soapy water on a white sheet or towel under a light on the floor of a room where the dogs usually sleeps. Fleas will be drawn to the light and will be visible on the sheet and drowned in the soapy water. Precautions must be used to prevent electrical and house fires.

**In addition to their pesky ability to cause frustration, fleas can cause medical problems in your ferret**. A flea's saliva can cause a severe allergic reaction, resulting in extreme itching, scratching, chewing, or nibbling of the skin. Should any of these symptoms occur in your pet, please call us for an appointment.

**The good news is that most of the flea products that are safe for cats can also be used for ferrets.** (although usually at slightly lower dosages). If you are having a problem with a flea infestation with your ferret, pleas gives us a all so we can discuss some of the very easy-to-use treatments and preventatives that are now available.

**DO NOT USE FLEA COLLARS ON FERRETS**. Medicines in flea collars cannot be tolerated by fleas and can lead to very serious reactions and even death.

# Aging In Ferrets

Ferrets start to show older age problems around 3 years old. We feel this is a good time to recommend some extra veterinary care and extra home care to try to catch any diseases or problems early so that they can be eliminated or treated.

**Foot Care**. The pads of older ferrets can become harder, thicker, and develop horny growths. A small amount of Vitamin E oil or Vaseline gently rubbed on the pads daily will help to keep them soft and less sensitive.

**Sleep**. Older ferrets like to sleep more. Please make sure they have a cozy and quiet place to do so.

**Brittle and/or Dry Haircoat**. This can be brought about by just age or by some disease processes. Do not bathe your ferret too frequently (more than once a month with a MILD shampoo) as this removes the natural oils and makes the hair even drier. Special emollient sprays should be used in between baths to add moisture and fatty acid supplements can be given. If you notice excessive hair loss, bald spots, red areas, or ulcers on the skin, please have your ferret examined by a veterinarian.

**Arthritis Symptoms**. Ferrets may begin to show this as weakness in the hind legs. Mild changes to their environment such as lower sides to their litter box and ramps in their cages can help them out. Any sudden or severe weakness/loss of balance should be examined by a veterinarian.

**Nutrition**. To put less workload on the kidneys and liver, a diet lower in calories and protein content should be fed to ferrets starting around the age of three. This change should be done gradually over several months by slowly mixing the regular food in with the new older ferret food. The new food should be the same brand of food as the original, just in the older (senior) formula.

**Veterinary Check-ups**. Examinations should be more frequent (every 6 months). Ferrets develop diseases rapidly (especially the previous mentioned cancers) and waiting one year between visits could prevent early detection and therefore, the management and treatment of the disease. Bloodwork and x-rays will also become part of the recommended yearly screening process to check your ferret for some of the more common diseases as these tests are extremely important in detecting the diseases early and facilitating treatment.

Ferrets are “different” animals, but they have been domesticated for years. They are intelligent and can quickly learn the “rules” of the household. They can be treated like any other domesticated animal and like their domesticated counterparts (dogs and cats) they should receive routine veterinary care and preventative medicine. Doing so will keep your ferret healthy and happy, and he/she will love you for it!!!!