

## Ferret Bites Hands

### How can a ferret be trained not to bite hands?

By Mary Van Dahm

Posted: August 13, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

**Q:** I brought home a 9-week-old baby ferret two days ago. When I went to get her, I asked the man if she was friendly and he said yes. He put his finger right on her mouth, and she did not bite him. I held her, and she was fine with me. I held her on my lap on the way back in the car and she was OK, just very lively and trying to nip me during her play.

The next morning, I tried to pick up my ferret. She jumped up at me and it looked like she was trying to bite me, so my dad put his hand in and tried to pick her up. She bit him. I think it was more of a nip as it did not draw blood.

Since then, my ferret has started to actually bite, and I am worried about leaving it too long before I start handling her in case she gets really aggressive, so I put on a real thick pair of gloves when I put my hand in her cage. When I stroke her or try to pick her up, my ferret bites and holds onto the glove. If I lift my arm out, she's dangling from the glove by her mouth. I have tried tapping her on the nose and saying no firmly, but this does not seem to bother her. Can you give me a few new ideas I can try before it's too late?

**A.** Aggression in young ferrets can be a frustrating problem. Make sure your new ferret is getting plenty of food and lots of water. Young ferrets need to eat and drink constantly. If they don't, they may bite other things, including your fingers. Moisten the food to help prevent bloat, which is very painful and may cause your ferret to act aggressively. If the moistened food is not all eaten within an hour or two, take it away so it doesn't spoil.

Offer your ferret fresh wet food three or four times a day, but have dry food and fresh water available, too. If she is not eating the brand of ferret food that you offer, try a different brand or ask the store or breeder what they fed her and get that brand for her. If food doesn't seem to be the problem, try offering your ferret a treat, such as Nutrical or Ferretone, as you reach in to pick her up. This will keep her mouth busy while you handle her.

Handle your ferret as often as you can and have other family members handle her, too. She may just be nervous or excited about being in a new home. If she was previously in with littermates or other ferrets, she may be lonely. When she sees you, she just gets too excited. Keep her cage somewhere in the house where she will get a lot of attention, but where she can have some quiet time to rest, too.

When you let her out to play, let her run around for a while first — at least 30 minutes or so — to wear herself out before trying to handle her. She may be less inclined to bite if she is tired.

Also be sure that your ferret has plenty of toys to play with both in and out of her cage. Make sure that the toys are safe to chew on, but can't be chewed up. Young ferrets are prone to blockages if they swallow things that are too big to pass. Don't use your hand as a toy and don't roughhouse with your ferret, or you will encourage her to keep biting.

Try putting Bitter Apple or a similar product on your hands. This type of product leaves a bitter residue on your hands so you don't taste good when your ferret tries to bite. Just be sure to wash it off before you eat lunch or your sandwich will taste bitter, too! (You should wash your hands before eating anyway.)

If your ferret shows no sign of improvement in her behavior after a few weeks, or if her behavior gets worse, take her to a veterinarian to make sure that she doesn't have a medical problem. Animals that don't feel well sometimes bite to let you know that something is wrong.

Good luck with your new ferret! I hope that these suggestions help you.

See more ferret questions and answers>>