

A Ferret Owner Is Concerned Over Ferret Anorexia

A ferret is not eating well after a recent adoption.

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Q: I just adopted a ferret from a family that did not want her anymore. I already had two. All three ferrets are female. The new one is not eating like she should be and has lost a lot of weight. The vet told me that it may be stress from the new environment. I am looking for a way to make it easier to get her to eat.

A: There are many factors that can cause a ferret not to eat. Stress is certainly one of them. Try letting your new ferret eat out of a separate bowl or set out several bowls around the house so she can eat without your other ferrets bothering her. You may also want to try different brands of food. Did the previous owners give you any of the food that she ate while at their house? If not, find out what brand it was and buy some for your ferret, even if it turns out to be a lower quality brand. Ferrets are imprinted early in life by certain foods and may not easily change to a new diet. Let her have her old brand straight for a few days and then slowly start adding a little bit of your brand to the bowl and mix it in. Every few days, increase the ratio of your brand to her old brand until she eventually accepts your brand.

If she is still not eating right or if she is getting very thin, take her back to the vet and have some blood work and X-rays done. She could have a hairball that is filling her stomach and making her not want to eat or she could possibly have cancer, which, unfortunately, is common in ferrets. The blood work and X-rays can help rule out or confirm these problems.

If your veterinarian still doesn't find anything wrong with your new ferret, you may want to try hand feeding her some ferret mush (dried food softened in warm water or chicken stock and blended to a pea soup consistency) or even some chicken or turkey baby food. Serve the mush or the baby food warm, but not hot. Heating the food helps enhance the aroma and may help entice your ferret to eat. A nutritional supplement, such as Nutrical or Ferretvite, can also be offered to your ferret to encourage her to eat. You can even mix some into the mush or baby food.

A final thing to keep in mind is that a ferret's weight can vary quite a bit with the seasons. If a ferret is born in the spring, it will usually gain weight in the fall and lose it again the following spring. A ferret that is born in the fall generally has the opposite cycle. Some ferrets will gain/lose a full third of their body weight. With all of the artificial light that we have on in our homes nowadays, some ferrets get a bit confused, especially if they come from one house to another with different light patterns. They may lose weight, but not put it back on when they should. But as long as your ferret is not bony or real skinny, there may be nothing wrong with her. It never hurts to have her checked out fully by your veterinarian to be sure.