

How To Care For A Pregnant Ferret

How do you care for a pregnant ferret?

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Q: I would like to know how to care for a pregnant female ferret. What should I feed her? What bedding should I use? I need to know how to take good care of her. Also, how can I know if she has a baby inside her that she can't give birth to?

A: First, make sure that your ferret gets enough nutrition to supply her needs and those of her developing kits. Buy the highest quality ferret food that you can find, even if it stretches your budget, and make sure that her food dish is full at all times. Provide her with plenty of clean, fresh water, too. If your ferret does not use a water bottle, train her to use one now. A bowl of water can cause a tragedy if the newly born kits climb into it.

Prepare the ferret cage carefully. Newborn ferrets (kits) are squirmy and have been known to fall through the bars of a cage. If you can rig your cage with a nest box, that is ideal. A nest box helps contain the kits until they are a little bigger, and it allows easy access for you to check up on them when the mother ferret isn't nursing. Line the nest box with pieces of soft fabric. Birthing-type baby blankets are great for this.

Even with a nest box, you should still put solid barriers on the floor of the ferret cage and 4 to 6 inches high around the bottom sides of the cage. These barriers help keep the kits from falling through the cage bars in case they manage to get out of the nest box. (Sometimes a baby ferret hangs onto its mother and gets pulled out of the nest box).

Plexiglas makes a great barrier for cages with openings in the floor and for cage sides. Cut it to fit pieces through the door to cover the bottom of the cage, and drill holes in the pieces for the sides so you can use twist-ties to secure them to the walls of the cage. A cage with a plastic pan-type bottom works well, too. Keep everything very clean, but be sure to use animal-safe products so you don't poison the kits. Kits can die of staph infections if the cage and bedding aren't kept clean.

If you can't put a nest box on the cage, get a pet bed with high sides so the mother ferret can feel secure. Line it with the birthing blankets so your ferret can make a nest. Have a second bed set up so when it comes time to change the bedding you can switch beds quickly without disturbing the mother ferret too much.

Having a litter of ferrets sounds exciting, but it can be a lot of work and very heartbreaking. If the mother ferret is very young or if this is her first litter, she may panic and not take care of the kits. Sometimes a mother ferret fails to produce milk. It is always a good idea to contact an experienced ferret breeder who has a ferret that is due about the same time as yours. This way you might be able to transfer your kits to the ferret breeder's mother ferret if your ferret fails to care for her litter.

If you have children in your house, keep them away from your mother ferret during birthing and for a few days after. I know that everyone will want to see the baby ferrets, but some mother ferrets will eat their young if they feel threatened by a lot of attention. Some mother ferrets may also bite if they feel that their kits are threatened. Watch your ferret carefully to see what her mood is. Offer her a treat, such as Ferretvite or Nutrical, as you put your hand in her cage so she knows that you mean no harm to her litter.

Last, but not least, take your ferret in to see your veterinarian prior to birthing to make sure no problems are detected. If your ferret is having problems during birthing or if she fails to produce milk, get her back to your veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian can give your ferret a shot to induce labor, if necessary. He or she can check to see if any baby ferrets are still inside, which can be a reason a mother ferret doesn't nurse.

To find out more about breeding ferrets, or to locate an experienced breeder in your area, contact the American Ferret Association.

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