

Is Ferret's Leg Broken Or Just Sore?

A ferret mysteriously begins limping, and its owner can't tell if a leg is broken or just sore.

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Q: My ferret is not putting any pressure on her leg. I did not see what happened, but she came running out from the couch into the corner, tail puffed. This happened on a Saturday night, and I couldn't get to the vet right away. I put mild pressure on the leg in all places, and she did not try to bite me or make sounds as if in pain. I also put my finger against her paw to see if she would push back, she did. So is it just sore?

A: It is impossible to know what could be wrong with your ferret's leg just from your description. That is why your veterinarian will do an extensive examination of the leg, the skin, the muscles, the bones and the joints. Many times, observation alone does not lead you to an answer. You need to move the leg and see if it moves in the normal manner. It never surprises me when a ferret is obviously injured but does not show pain. Ferrets are some of the most stoic animals we care for.

Because you are only seeing your ferret limping, but do not report the leg being held in an abnormal position, it could be that a tendon, ligament or joint is damaged. Any of these things could occur acutely, i.e. the leg could get caught under the couch and when she tried to come out from under the couch, she twisted the leg and caused damage.

Tendon and ligament injuries can heal on their own, usually, with just cage rest. Joint damage, if it is minor, also can heal well on its own. Severe joint damage like a torn joint tendon might need surgical repair. These are the more typical problems we see.

In older ferrets, sometimes chronic conditions cause acute problems. So, if your ferret had chronic arthritis in a joint that was not painful, but then twisted her leg under the couch, that could make the chronic condition painful and cause the limping.

Take your ferret to the veterinarian, as there are some good medications to decrease swelling and help lessen the pain involved with an injury.