

## Does A Ferret Have IBS Or Something Else?

**A ferret owner seeks an answer to what is making her ferret sick.**

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**Q:** My ferret Pepe is a 3-year-old male. He has been spoiled rotten over his 3 years. Most people who visit my home say he is treated better than most people they know. Food and fresh water are available at all times. His diet consists of dry ferret food, mixed with just a little bit of cat food. He also takes daily vitamins. We also were giving him fish oils once daily on his food.

We started to notice he was sleeping a lot more and losing weight. We kept a close eye on his movements, checking to see if he was getting into anything he shouldn't. He ate and drank well, and his bowels did fine. We took his brother and him to the veterinarian; she said they were OK and very healthy.

Recently, I noticed Pepe cough, or seem choked, then have what I call the "dry heaves" with a little foam. Afterward he seemed fine, I thought maybe he was eating too fast and choking.

Then I noticed his feces looked slimy and green, almost like algae, with normal consistency (no diarrhea). When I investigated it, it was almost like a cocoon. Inside the feces were tiny seedlike things. I thought he may have worms, so I called the veterinarian and set up an appointment. Meanwhile, he seemed more sluggish, sleeping a lot, but ate like normal. I even tried giving him duck soup for the acidophilus in it, but he refused it.

The veterinarian examined the feces I brought and said it seemed to her that he had colitis or IBS. Breaking my heart, she gave him a steroid shot, and said if he wasn't better within three or four days to give her another call.

His bowels move normally, but some of the "green slime" exists. He still eats well and sleeps a lot. He also still plays with his brother, but he is losing weight to the point I can feel his little bones. He shivers and gets cold easily, so I keep his cage near the heat so he doesn't chill. I am almost afraid that when I hold him I will break one of his little bones.

I don't doubt my veterinarian, but I live in a small town, and worry that there's something else I may be able to do for him before he gets to the point of no return if something is wrong. The veterinarian is the only one around here that deals with ferrets. I was given no background on this IBS &mdash; what causes it or how it can be treated, or if that's even what the problem is. He seems to be getting worse. I am really concerned.

**A:** What your doctor might have been referring to is inflammatory bowel syndrome or inflammatory bowel disease. Both terms are a general description of what happens when inflammatory white blood cells start accumulating in the wall of the intestinal tract. The white blood cells are there to fight infection, but sometimes the presence of the white blood cells is also part of the problem along with whatever caused the initial infection.

These two conditions do not always allow the intestine to function properly. Nutrients, fluids and electrolytes are not absorbed, and the loss of these things leads to weight loss and dehydration. Blood tests and radiographs do not always give you the answer. The best test is to take a biopsy of various areas of the gastrointestinal system. Then the correct therapy can begin.