

## Ferret Gains Weight

### Is a ferret's weight gain from overeating or something else?

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**Q:** I have three ferrets that live in the same cage. Skitch, the oldest, has put on a significant amount of weight. While the other ferrets play, Skitch sleeps. When watching him try to play, he seems to stumble, as if his body weight pulls him down. I don't know what to do about this. I feed them all in their cage, but apparently Skitch eats a lot more than the others. What do I do about this? Should I feed them separately? I don't always feed them right after their bowls are empty, but I don't want the other ferrets to suffer and not get any food. I would really appreciate any feedback you have.

**A:** Ferrets, unlike cats and dogs, rarely eat too much and become obese. They are usually very active, which burns up calories, and they don't seem to have the same "drive" as dogs and cats to ingest more calories than their body needs. So it is unusual when we hear about a ferret such as Skitch.

You may be correct that Skitch seems to hog the food, and he has become so overweight that he cannot move around as a normal ferret would. If this is really true, you may need to separate the ferrets when food is available. But this is an unlikely scenario.

I am concerned about your characterization of Skitch as sleeping a lot and stumbling. To be sure that there are no medical issues causing the sleeping and stumbling, have Skitch examined by your veterinarian. He or she may look for evidence of an insulinoma, other metabolic disease or even heart disease. All of these conditions could slow down your ferret and cause him to increase his weight. Sometimes, the fluid build up associated with heart disease can masquerade as weight gain. In some unfortunate instances, even cancer can look like weight gain.

The best that you can do for Skitch is to get your ferret to his veterinarian, make sure he has a clean bill of health, and then get him on a diet and encourage him to exercise by having fun play times with him.