

Do Ferrets With Adrenal Gland Disease Need Lupron For Life?

What is the medical treatment for adrenal gland disease in ferrets?

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Q: My 2 ½-year-old ferret was diagnosed a couple of months ago with adrenal disease. I was very sad about the news, but the veterinarian told me that her hair might grow back and her disease might slow down with a monthly dose of Lupron. I have been doing that for four months, and, thanks God, her hair has grown back. Is it true that I have to have her on Lupron for the rest of her life, or did the veterinarian tell me that to get money? Every dose costs me \$40, plus the stress of taking her to the veterinarian and waiting for almost two hours just for her shot. Does it really have to be monthly, or can it be every two months?

A: I am glad to hear that your ferret responded positively to Lupron (leuprolide acetate). That is good news. You ask some great questions. First, I do not believe your veterinarian recommended this treatment to get money. The cost of Lupron is very expensive for veterinarians, because it is a drug made for people. The cost that you have been quoted is close to the price your veterinarian probably paid to buy the drug for your ferret.

A bigger question is, does it make medical sense to keep your ferret on Lupron for the rest of its life, and should it get monthly injections? No one can answer that question with sound scientific data. Some ferrets need monthly injections to minimize the signs of adrenal gland disease. Some ferrets can get away with injections much less frequently; possibly once every few months. Some ferrets are given longer acting Lupron formulations and only need injections once every four months. And some ferrets become resistant to the effects of Lupron and further injections no longer cause the signs to disappear. At that point, further injections of Lupron are not useful.

No one can say for certain which category your ferret will fall into. What you can do is to tell your veterinarian that you do not want monthly injections and ask to start spreading out the injections to once every two months. If that works, try once every three months.

The most important thing to consider is that it is likely that Lupron only causes the outward signs of adrenal gland disease to go away in ferrets. The adrenal gland(s) may still be abnormal and continue to grow in size even though your ferret may look normal on the outside. This is the reason, if it is possible, we always recommend surgery to remove the diseased adrenal gland, especially in a ferret as young as yours.

Other medical therapies have been used to treat the signs of adrenal gland disease in ferrets. You may want to ask your veterinarian his or her opinion on these medications and the relative costs. Some of those medications include implantable melatonin and oral medications, such as Arimidex (anastrozole).