

Ferret Drinks Urine

Why would a ferret drink urine?

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Q: I have a ferret that developed a recent habit of drinking his and sometimes other ferret's urine. He also has occasional normal-colored, liquid stools. His urine smells normal, and he always has access to fresh water. Is this any sign of disease or just a new behavior?

A: Urine drinking is a vexing question in the world of ferrets. This is a commonly observed behavior and it usually starts out of nowhere. A ferret that appears healthy and has adequate drinking water in its enclosure suddenly begins drinking its own urine and maybe other ferret's urine.

Some of the various reasons that have been postulated for this include territorial behavior, a need for salt, adrenal gland disease and kidney disease. Most ferrets that are brought to the veterinarian's hospital for this problem check out normally. Their blood work and their urinalysis are normal.

So again, why do ferrets do this? It's not likely to be a natural behavior, because wild animals usually are not in contact with their urine. They urinate and quickly move on to another area and don't have the opportunity to ingest their urine.

In an enclosure, ferrets are in contact with their bodily wastes and have more access to ingest what we believe is unhealthy. If we don't anthropomorphize this behavior and look at it from a ferret's perspective, what is wrong with lapping up this liquid that is sterile and probably a little salty to the taste? It is just another water source to the ferret.

My advice is to be cautious. Bring your ferret to the veterinarian to make sure everything is normal, and then try to change around the enclosure so your ferret has less access to urine.