

## Itchy Ferret

### **Why is a ferret scratching itself enough to cause fur loss and scabs?**

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**Q:** I have a 6-month-old ferret that itches so much that he now has three spots with missing fur and scabs. He eats well, drinks fine and still plays like crazy. He has no signs of a temperature. I have not changed laundry detergent. What can I do to help him? I have not bathed him since December, so I don't think it is because of overbathing.

**A:** Compared to dogs and cats, some ferrets seem to spend more time scratching. However, the scratching should not cause missing fur or scabs. Only a few problems in ferrets will cause what you describe, scratching so much that there is fur loss and scabs on the skin.

1. In an older ferret, adrenal gland disease is always tops on the list. If your ferret is truly 6 months old, however, adrenal gland disease is very, very unlikely.
2. A mast cell tumor is another unlikely cause, given the age of your ferret.
3. The next most common problem would be skin parasites, such as fleas or mites. Fleas are not always obvious, but the excrement they leave behind on the skin is easily seen. Mites are difficult to see with the naked eye. They are usually detected when your veterinarian uses a microscope to examine a sample he or she takes from the top of your ferret's skin.
4. Some types of skin cancer may cause your ferret to scratch to the point that there is fur loss, but these types of skin cancer are an unlikely cause due to your ferret's age.
5. Sometimes something in the environment, such as detergent, could cause a reaction on the ferret's skin.

The best way to determine what is causing this problem is to visit your ferret's veterinarian and have him or her take a look at the problem. Most skin problems are not difficult to diagnose, so your veterinarian should be able to determine the cause and make your ferret more comfortable.