

A Ferret's Tongue Trouble

Why does a ferret gag on its own tongue?

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Q: Sometimes my little boy ferret bites his tongue as if it gets in the way whenever he eats, or drinks, or grooms himself or his brother. It gets my attention because I believe him to be choking. He gets so spun up about it that he often gags/coughs and would continue chewing on it if I didn't intervene by holding his mouth open long enough for him to regain his composure. I don't believe his tongue is too big for his mouth, but he does it so often that I wonder if he has trouble controlling it. What could cause this and how can I prevent it, if possible?

A: This is a very unusual problem for a ferret. We don't expect to see problems with the tongue in ferrets and certainly not a ferret biting its tongue.

A few possible explanations exist for what you are seeing. First, is there a growth on the tongue that is causing it to be "in the way" when your ferret needs to groom or eat? This would be very unusual, but it could occur either due to an abscess or a mass.

Second, it could be that your ferret has abnormal control of his tongue. There are nerves that originate directly in the brain and it would be very unusual for those nerves only to be affected, in any animal, not just a ferret.

Another possibility is that there is a malocclusion of your ferret's teeth. This would cause his tongue to get trapped between his teeth each time he moves his bottom and lower jaws.

The only way to know exactly what is going on is to visit your veterinarian and let him or her look at this problem more closely.

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