

Ferret Suddenly Becomes Very Sleepy After New Ferret Arrives

Why would a ferret suddenly become lethargic soon after another ferret joins the family?

By Karen Rosenthal, DVM, DABVP

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Q: I recently bought a baby male ferret to keep my 1-year-old female ferret company. To begin with she loved it, and they played all the time. Over the last week, however, she has become lethargic and uninterested with play; all she wants to do is sleep. I rushed her to the vet's but she seemed to brighten up while she was there so they sent her home.

She is neutered and isn't due for her vaccination for three months. I'm worrying myself sick. She is eating and drinking, and her poop seems fine, maybe a little green but not much. I am concerned about heartworm or perhaps depression. My little boy is fine and full of bounce. Is there any advice you can give that I could use or tell my vet to look for?

A: It sounds like you have done all the right things. It was very smart to watch your older ferret once you brought a new one into the house. And once you saw something that was upsetting (lethargy), you went to see her veterinarian.

Your experience is not uncommon. Many times, owners tell me their pet is lethargic at home only to have the pet "perk up" once it arrives at our office. Sometimes, it is because the pet's illness is transitory; by the time the pet comes in to see us, the pet is on the mend. Or sometimes it is because the pet has an "adrenaline rush" by coming into our office — and its excitement masks its illness.

It's not always possible for veterinarians to tell the difference between this excitement phase and a pet that is improving from its illness.

In such cases, if an examination shows no abnormalities, we usually recommend that the pet be taken home and observed during the next 24 hours. If the ferret goes back to looking ill, then we recommend the owner come back in and we start searching for some answers. This usually means running a few tests like a complete blood count and biochemistry profile.

Your ferret is probably too young to have an insulinoma, but that's usually something to consider when a ferret is lethargic. And sometimes epizootic catarrhal enteritis starts with periods of lethargy and no other signs of disease.

With further diagnostic testing, your veterinarian should be able to rule in or out these diseases, along with other possible causes of the signs you are observing.

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