

Visible Signs Of A Ferret Being Neutered

Can you tell by looking whether a ferret has been neutered?

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Q: How do you know if your ferret has been neutered?

A: It is very easy to know if your male ferret has been neutered, in most cases. Testicles sit in the scrotal sac. The scrotal sac in ferrets is external and is easily seen in intact ferrets. Once a ferret has been neutered, the scrotal sac becomes very small and basically disappears; you cannot tell that they were ever present. This is unlike a dog where the scrotal sacs are still apparent even when a dog has been neutered years earlier.

In very, very rare instances, the testicles do not reach the scrotal sac. These are called retained or undescended testicles. The testicles can remain in the abdomen as they never travel to the scrotal sac but are "stuck" in the abdomen. In these ferrets, they may appear neutered because testicles cannot be palpated in the scrotal sacs, but in fact the testicles are in the abdomen. In most of these ferrets, the testicles remain dormant in the abdomen. But in some ferrets, the testicles can produce a large amount of testosterone causing behavioral changes in the ferret. Or in even rarer instances, one or both testicles can become cancerous.

Retained testicles in ferrets are extraordinarily rare. If you are concerned about your ferret having retained testicles, have your veterinarian do a blood test to measure testosterone concentrations. These concentrations should be almost zero in neutered ferrets but will be present at normal or elevated concentrations in non-neutered ferrets. Finally, your veterinarian can do an abdominal ultrasound looking for abdominal testicles.

Female ferrets, if they are not neutered (spayed), do not show outward signs for most of the year. But if a female is not spayed, when she comes into heat, there will be obvious signs that she is intact. Spayed females do not come into heat.

Unspayed females will show an enlarged vulva initially. If the female is not bred and remains in heat, the vulva remains enlarged and there may be discharge from the vulva. There may be some hair loss on the abdomen. Most importantly, with prolonged estrus, the red blood cell count decreases as the high concentration of estrogen stops the production of these blood cells. Over time, the ferret's nice pink nose becomes white due to the lack of blood production and even the tissues in the mouth take on a very pale appearance.

Intact female ferrets remain in heat until they are bred or eventually become very sick due to the lack of red cells and will die. The other methods used to take the female ferret out of heat include injecting medication to stop the production of estrogen, breeding the female to a sterile male or spaying her.

To sum up, if the female is not in heat, there is no external method you can use to determine if she is neutered or not.

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