

## Ferret Suffers Mysterious Cough & Sneeze Attacks

### Why would a ferret cough and sneeze regularly but at random?

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**Q:** My male, panda ferret sometimes breaks out into this awful cough/sneeze, and I am not sure what it is. He is only a year old. My vet said not to worry about it, but I'd like to know what it possibly could be. It sounds like he is choking and it happens randomly through the day. He wakes up and starts doing it or he does it while he is eating.

Do you have any ideas of what this could be? I always run over and comfort him while it happens. I don't think he has swallowed anything because it has been going on for a couple of months, and he gets a hairball remedy weekly.

**A:** This is something we hear about in ferrets every so often. It is difficult to tell if this is choking or sneezing. As you mention, it can happen randomly but more often is associated with eating.

There are lots of thoughts on what this can be. Theories I've heard include allergies, eating too fast, polyps in the oral cavity, megaesophagus, sinus cavity infection or a congenital defect causing an abnormal opening between the oral cavity and nasal cavity. If you wish to investigate this further, there is a lot of testing you can do. You may or may not find the answer, and your doctor could be correct in that you do not have to worry about this.

Because you do not know what is causing the problem, it is natural to worry. Here are some suggestions that your doctor may make if you wish to go further to investigate this problem. Radiographs of the skull and chest both while your ferret is sedated and when he is actively chewing. Ultrasound of the chest to look for lung or heart problems. Advanced techniques like an endoscopic examination of the oral cavity and also a CAT scan or MRI of the oral cavity. Your doctor may also treat for infections and allergies in case these are causing the problem. Ferrets are not known to get allergies but maybe your ferret has a hypersensitivity to something in the environment.