

## Dirty Ferret Ears

**Dirty ears in a ferret could indicate ear mites, infection or another cause; only a veterinarian can make a diagnosis.**

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**Q:** My daughter has two ferrets and about four months ago they started having a brown discharge from their ears. We asked the vet in our small town (he doesn't have any ferret clients) what to do and they sold us some ear mite medicine to use once a week for six weeks. This didn't work, so we bought some ear mite treatment from a pet store, but their ears don't seem any better. My daughter can clean their ears with a cotton swab but they seem the same a few days later. Any suggestions?

**A:** Ferrets commonly get ear mites. But they can be difficult to treat if you don't have the proper medication. The first thing you need is a diagnosis.

Ferrets can have brown discharge from their ears without any ear mites being present. The only way to know what is going on in the ears is for your ferrets' doctor to place the discharge on a slide and make some stains out of it. Another set of slides can be made with mineral oil to look for ear mites. Ear mites are very easy to see. The stained slides are used to look for cells. If there is infection, a certain type of white blood cell will be seen along with bacteria. If there is no inflammation or infection, all that will be on the slides will be evidence of the discharge; no cells will be present.

It is important to know which of these three conditions is present because each is treated differently. Ear mites are best treated with medication in the ferret's ears. If that does not work, stronger medication given by injection should be used. If there is infection, then other treatments should be used, including antibiotics. Finally, if there is just discharge, agents used to dry out the waxy ear discharge should be used.

If you are not happy with the knowledge your veterinarian has of ferrets, you have a couple of choices. One would be to travel to find someone who knows about ferrets. Or ask your veterinarian if he or she would be willing to consult with a ferret-knowledgeable veterinarian; you may be asked to pay for the consult. Even though this is an added charge, it is still less expensive and more convenient than traveling a far distance to find another veterinarian.

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