

Ferret Wheezes At Night During Certain Seasons

Owner and vets search for cause of ferret's seasonal wheezing.

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Q: I have seen two vets for an ongoing issue with one of my ferrets. She wheezes like she is going to throw up a hairball, which I am aware they don't do. It lasts for up to a minute sometimes, but other times just a few seconds. She has never been in any dusty environments or unapproved litter. I have three other ferrets too. They all share the same cage. None of them have any issues.

My ferret, Poco, has had this issue only at certain times of the year. All winter she was fine. Could it be that she has asthma or allergies? We haven't had any windows open recently in our house so I hesitate to even to ask that. Also it seems that the problem has moved into her chest, kind of like us having a deep chest cough. Even when she breathes you can hear it. She never coughs up anything, and her feces are normal. She likes to try and drink out of glasses with ice cubes, so this is how I try and help her when she gets coughing, and I use Ferret Lax as well. Otherwise she just sits still and doesn't help herself to any water.

Also, something else is that it really only happens when she is asleep. One doctor here in southern Illinois I feel somewhat experimented on her with different medicines. I figured this out a little later and switched to another doctor who thinks she has asthma or allergies.

I've done a lot of digging for info on this topic and can't seem to get a clear response on what it might be. Poco is a FFF ferret and is 3 years and 5 months old. She was the first ferret I got. I would greatly appreciate any help you can give me on this situation. I have spent a lot of money on her for all the vet visits, and I don't have anywhere else to receive other opinions besides books or Internet now.

A: Obviously, you care a lot about Poco and have tried to do a lot to help her. It is also obvious she has an unusual problem. Ferrets are not known to have allergies or asthma. That being said, there can be things in the environment that irritate the ferret's respiratory tract and may present like an allergy. It sounds like you need two things for Poco — a diagnosis and a treatment.

The diagnostic part will be difficult, as you have seen, because the problem is seasonal and unusual. We need to figure out if Poco is having a reaction to something in the environment or if there is an internal disease problem.

In terms of the environment, you may need to do more investigating and experimenting. Maybe there is a detergent or cleaner or freshener that irritates Poco's respiratory system. Maybe the filters in the heating or air conditioning system need to be extremely clean for Poco to breathe properly. Consider changing the filters more frequently. These are things that you can do at home. It is also possible that Poco has an internal condition that is exacerbated by something in the environment.

I know you have spent a lot of time and money at a couple of different doctors, but you may need to seek at a third veterinarian if you are unhappy with the last two. There is an excellent veterinary teaching hospital in Illinois that may be of help to you and Poco.

Some of the things that another doctor would recommend would include blood tests, chest radiographs, an ultrasound of the chest, a tracheal wash, an examination of the oral cavity while Poco is sedated, and even a CT scan of Poco's skull. It may be that only with intensive diagnostic testing will you be able to figure out what is wrong with Poco, which will allow you to treat her appropriately to make her comfortable.

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