

## Is My Ferret Too Thin?

**What would cause a ferret to lose weight and become too thin, enough to see its bones?**

*By Karen Rosenthal, DVM, MS*

Posted: April 2, 2008, 2 a.m. EST

**Q:** My ferret Farah has seemingly been losing weight over the past few months. She's a small ferret and still looks like a kit, but is 5 years old. I'm just wondering if her weight loss is normal because she's getting old or if it's something else. She does eat and get out of the cage to run for about an hour at least every day. Our other ferret, Taz, isn't losing weight but he's about a year or two younger than she is. They both eat in and out of the cage. But both don't want to spend more than an hour out of the cage each time. I just hate seeing my baby girl so skinny that I see her bones while giving her a bath now.

**A:** Ferrets, by nature, are not fat animals. They are more on the thin side. But your ferret should not be so thin that her bones are prominent. When I see a ferret that is too thin, I ask these questions: 1) Are enough calories going into the ferret; 2) If they are, why are they not being absorbed by the body?

If the ferret is not eating enough calories, find out why. Is the calorie content too low in the food? If so, change the food. Is there a behavioral reason — a ferret-bully keeping the thin ferret from eating, is the food in an area the ferret cannot get to or doesn't want to get to, is the food rancid? Is the ferret not eating because of disease — dental disease, gastrointestinal disease? Is there a problem with the jaw?

If the ferret is eating the correct number of calories, move on to the next question. Why is the ferret not absorbing the calories? This is usually due to a disease in the gastrointestinal tract. When disease is in the gastrointestinal tract, calories are not absorbed if the lining of the tract is either too thin or too thick. This is a generalization but it makes understanding of the disease easier for most of us.

A thin gastrointestinal tract means there are not enough cells to absorb calories; this may be due to chronic disease. A thick gastrointestinal tract means either inflammation or cancer may be present. In either case, usually a biopsy of the gastrointestinal tract is needed to figure out the problem.

See all Ask The Doc questions and answers»