

## Ferret Nutrition Roundtable, Ferret Nutrition Question #7

### Is the shape of kibble important?

By Sandy Meyer

Posted: May 23, 2008, 7 p.m. EDT

#### Ferret Nutrition Question #7

##### Is the shape of kibble important?

MM: It's not so much the shape of the kibble, it has to do with the texture of kibble. If you can take a kibble between your fingers and you can slightly roll it between your fingers and crush it, that is the proper density kibble, or bite ratio, for that animal. If no matter how hard you squeeze you can't break it and all you do is hurt your fingers, then yes, a ferret can eat that, but keep in mind, ferrets teeth are carnivore teeth, they're highly pointed; they only have some crunching molars in the back.

What they're finding out in research is that the teeth of ferrets are wearing down to nothing after about 3 years of age. That is because that food particle is too hard and they're used to ripping flesh, they're not used to crunching things. So when you feed them a kibble, if that kibble's too hard, you're actually damaging the teeth and you're wearing those away long before they should be worn away. You need the softer-bite food.

Also keep in mind that sometimes that kibble is so hard that it actually breaks suddenly, and then a part of that food goes up and lodges in the gum. It causes pain when it does that, and sometimes it will put a ferret off its food because that food hurt them, and then they're a little more wary about it the second time around.

PR: I think that there are people out there that think it is but, overall, if ferrets are hungry, they're going to get used to the ration that owners feed them. We are proponents of vacuum-dried processing because it breaks down very easily in the ferret's system and because their digestive system is very short; it breaks down rapidly and absorbs into their body quickly, where an extruded pellet is much harder and it's harder for them to digest into their system. Oftentimes ferrets have to eat more [of the extruded pellets] to get the nutritional requirements out of it.

[Vacuum-dried] is a patented process that protects the proteins of the amino acid better than a higher-temperature extrusion process. Because they're strict carnivores, we're talking about meat and protecting the nutritional value of that meat. It basically goes back to when they tell you to cook a steak. The best way to cook a steak is so that it's pink in the middle at the little lower heat so that you're getting the nutritional value of it. If you cook your steak until it's brown all the way through it, you've really lost a lot of the nutritional value of that piece of meat.

SW: Kibble shape can aid in tooth cleaning. Ferrets are also very tactile, and kibble shape can be a turn on or off for them.

TW: All kibbles are not created equal. There are hard kibbles that ferrets have trouble eating, there are moderate and then there are softer kibbles. Just because it's a kibble doesn't mean it's the same.

You have different shapes. Shape has a lot to do with how an animal eats a food. It's hard for a ferret to eat a spherical or a round like a small BB or a small pellet. It's hard for them to eat that because of the way their teeth are arranged, and they're carnivores so it's hard for them to chew. They don't have the flat molars like we do, so it's very difficult for them to eat a round or a spherical pellet. [Pellets] need to have a shape to them like a star or a triangle or something that's got a way for the [ferret] to bite into.

If the food is not properly cooked or properly manufactured, it can be very hard. That's not good for a ferret either. Shape, texture and mouth feel are all three things that affect it.

GS: Palatability seems to be a primary factor in whether a ferret will eat a food, but the nugget shape and size in commercial diets also seems to play an important role. Some ferrets become attached to a certain shape or size of nugget and won't accept anything else.

JF: I do not think so.

KJ: Shape, size and texture of a kibble are all important factors in how well a ferret takes to a food and is also very important because of the angle and spacing of the ferret's teeth.

KS: The size and texture of the kibble are more important than the shape. The size should be large enough to induce chewing while comfortably fitting into the ferret's mouth. The texture should not be so hard that it is difficult to chew, but it should be hard enough to provide mechanical cleaning of the teeth to prevent tartar build up.

LG: Food shape and texture can mean the difference between a willingness to consume a meal or outright rejection, but one cannot necessarily say it is a rule that ferrets need a certain shape of food. Again, the natural food model serves as the guide.

<< [Back To Article](#)

#### Meet The Panelists

Each ferret-food manufacturer representative is identified by his or her initials.

MM: Michael Massey, president of Pretty Bird International Inc.

PR: Peter Reid, president of Marshall Pet Products Inc.

SW: Stefan Wawrzynski, operations director for Brisky Pet Products.

TW: Tom Willard, Ph.D., president of Totally Ferret/Performance Foods Inc.

GS: Gail Shepherd, senior marketing manager at ZuPreem, a division of Premium Nutritional Products Inc.

JF: Jack Fallenstein, owner of Triple F Farms Inc.

KJ: Ken Johnson, national accounts manager at D & D Commodities Ltd.

KS: Kathy Schneider, technical services manager for Central Avian & Small Animal, a division of Kaytee Products Inc.

LG: Lucas Gillis, supervisor, office manager at Wysong Corp.