

Proper Ferret Nutrition

Here's a look at what to feed your ferret, what not to feed and how to tell the difference

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Food will have the greatest impact on your ferret's health and overall well being. Ferrets, like dogs and cats, are carnivores and as such, require a high-quality food made of animal proteins and fats as the basis of their daily diet. The food must be fresh to attract the ferret to eat it, nutritious for easy digestion and efficiently utilized by the ferret's body to minimize stool and odor.

A well-balanced, quality food is required to build and maintain a healthy body with strong muscles and supporting bones and an effective immune system to lessen the impact of stress and disease.

Basic Nutrition

Ferrets require some 65 different nutrients, which are divided into seven major categories: proteins, fats, simple carbohydrates, complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water.

Proteins are made of building blocks known as amino acids, which come from animal protein. Amino acids are easily digested and utilized by the ferret because they match the ferret's needs more exactly than amino acids from vegetable proteins.

Fats are made of individual building blocks known as fatty acids, which are best for ferrets if they come from animal sources. It is this genetic fact that classifies ferrets as carnivores and makes it imperative that they receive food made from animal sources.

Carbohydrates, both simple and complex, are required only to make the food in a form that ferrets recognize and like to eat. Simple carbohydrates, such as starches, furnish energy, which in turn reduces the energy requirements needed from proteins and fats. Complex carbohydrates, like fiber, are poorly digested, and excess of this nutrient can cause loose, foul stools.

Vitamins and minerals are required mainly as metabolic regulators and must be in the correct balance and levels with all other nutrients if they are to function properly. This is why excess supplementation with vitamins and minerals can cause more harm than good. Vitamin supplements should be used under the direction of a veterinarian.

Water, of course, is required by all animals for life and provides a medium for nutrient transport within and among the cells. Always have a clean, fresh source of water for your pet.

Ultimately, the quality of any food is best measured by the animal eating it. How the pet performs on the food and how it looks, feels and acts are the best measures of the quality of the food. A pet with bright eyes, silky hair and supple skin that is not overweight and has well-formed small stools without a strong odor is the goal.