

The Well-Groomed Ferret

Keep your ferret in top condition by following these grooming tips.

By Carolyn Koch

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Groom your ferret regularly to help improve its health.

The following guidelines can help you keep your pet in good shape.

Ears

A ferret's ears can accumulate a reddish brown wax buildup if they are not cleaned on a regular basis (at least once a week). To clean the ears, take a cotton swab that has been dipped in baby oil, peroxide or an ear cleanser, and gently sweep inside the ear. Never use a dry cotton swab. Be careful not to push the swab too far into the ear; you may damage the inner ear and eardrum.

In the event of mites, noticeable by a blackish colored wax, consult your veterinarian, who may prescribe a medication to treat the infection.

Nails

Keeping nails trimmed prevents a ferret from catching or snagging them on materials in the cage or carpeting in your home; it also prevents your ferret from scratching you. Nails should be trimmed at least every other week. You can use human nail clippers or a pair of cat nail clippers.

Scruff the ferret by its neck so that its feet are dangling, then clip the nails while the ferret is motionless. Or place the ferret on your lap, facing away from you, and put some Linatone or Ferratone on its belly. While the ferret is licking itself, you can trim the nails with little trouble or interference.

Be careful not to clip the nail too close to the quick (the pink part inside the nail), or it will bleed, and you will have one unhappy ferret. Should this happen, a little cornstarch with water will stop the bleeding, as will styptic powder or Clotisol, a veterinary blood-clotting cream.

Teeth

Tartar can develop on your ferret's teeth as the animal ages. If tartar builds up at an early age, the cause could be the food your ferret is eating or possibly the ferret's drinking water.

To clean your ferret's teeth, use a cloth with a little baking soda on it to remove tartar, or use toothpaste specially made for cats and ferrets. Scruffing the ferret by the back of its neck will cause the ferret to yawn and will allow you to clean its teeth. Do not use a scraper.

As a ferret ages, its teeth will turn slightly yellowish and sometimes light brown. Have a veterinarian check the ferret's teeth if you notice sudden discoloration or any redness along the gum line.

Skin and Coat

Baths are recommended at least twice a month, but many ferret owners wash their pets once a week. Too much bathing, however, will cause the skin to dry out and will dull the ferret's coat.

Most ferrets don't appreciate being bathed, so try to make bath time as pleasant as you can. The best way to bathe your ferret is to hold it securely while washing it. Do not fill a sink or tub and let the ferret run loose in the water or you will frighten the animal. Make sure to use a shampoo formulated for cats or a ferret shampoo that will not harm its eyes.

Conditioner is just as important as a good shampoo. It will not only help deodorize your ferret, but also help put back some moisture into its skin after shampooing.

Towel-drying your ferret is the safest and most effective method of drying. Avoid using hair dryers - the noise alone is enough to scare any pet from bath time.

If fleas are a problem, use a shampoo that contains pyrethrums (a natural poison made from chrysanthemums) to kill the

fleas. Never dip a ferret. Flea powder formulated for cats can be used to keep fleas under control.

In between baths, brush and comb your ferret as needed.

Maintaining and grooming a ferret the proper way may have much to do with your relationship with your ferret. After all, a clean and well-kept ferret is a happy, healthy ferret.