

## Young Ferrets

### **The best treatment for ferrets under 3 years old**

*By Dr. Susan A. Brown*

Prior to your first veterinary visit (or any visit to the vet, for that matter), write down any questions or observations you may have concerning your pet. This way you will not run the risk of forgetting important information. The history of a patient is vitally important to the pet's proper medical care. Bring a pen and some paper along, too, so you can take notes during the examination.

#### Examinations

During the ferret's initial visit, the vet will do a complete physical examination. This will include a check of the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, teeth, lymph nodes, abdomen, skin, hair coat, extremities and heart. If anything abnormal is noted, you will be advised of the medical recommendations for that condition. Ferrets up to 3 years of age should have a minimum of one physical examination each year.

#### Vaccinations

Next, your veterinarian will explain canine distemper boosters and rabies vaccinations, depending on the age and vaccination history of your pet. Because vaccine reactions can occasionally occur with all vaccines currently in use, some veterinarians recommend waiting at least 20 minutes at the vet's office after a vaccination has been given to make sure there is no problem. Both canine distemper and rabies vaccinations should be given annually after the initial series is completed.

#### Heartworm Prevention

If you live in an area that has heartworm disease, it may be advisable to put your pet on heartworm preventive, especially if the pet is kept outdoors or is taken outdoors a great deal. The monthly heartworm preventive given to dogs can be used with ease in a scaled down dose for ferrets. Your vet may want to perform a blood test first to check for heartworms prior to using preventive medications.

#### Spay/Neuter

If your ferret is not already altered, and you are not using it for breeding, you should schedule an appointment for spay or neuter surgery. Male ferrets that are not neutered can develop a strong body odor and break litter-training habits when they become sexually mature. Female ferrets can suffer from a potentially fatal anemia when they are in heat for prolonged periods of time.

#### Diet

Your veterinarian should discuss your pet's diet and may recommend supplements. For example, I believe it is important to give a cat hairball preventative at least two to three times a week. Hairballs are a common problem in older ferrets, and the hairball laxative aids in the removal of hair before it can form a blockage of the stomach or intestines. You also may be advised to use a fatty acid supplement if your pet's coat is dry or flaky.

#### Laboratory Tests

Some veterinarians may recommend that laboratory testing be done routinely on your pet. For healthy ferrets between 6 months and 2 years of age, I recommend a complete blood cell count (CBC) once a year, for two reasons. First, it is the only means we have available now to screen for lymphoma by looking for abnormal or high numbers of lymphocytes on blood smears. And second, in the healthy pet, it gives us some normal data for comparison later on in the face of disease. Other tests may be recommended based on an abnormal finding during the physical examination.

#### Emergency Service

During the first visit, make sure you receive clear information on how to handle an after-hours emergency. Some veterinary clinics will refer such cases to an emergency clinic. Some emergency clinics don't want to handle ferrets or simply don't have the expertise. Most veterinarians that see ferrets will have provided for this contingency ahead of time; however, you need to know where to take your pet in an emergency before an emergency occurs.

#### Local Organizations

Check with your vet regarding local ferret interest groups you can contact. Such local organizations can provide invaluable help when you are dealing with simple behavioral problems or are facing a crisis.