

## Ferret Communication

**Use this ferret-to-human dictionary to communicate better with your pet ferret.**

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### A Health Concern For Ferrets

**Insulinoma:** This isn't an active communication from the ferret, but it's a good idea to learn the signs of this ailment so you know if your ferret may have it.

Insulinoma is a tumor on the pancreas that makes the ferret's blood sugar drop. Symptoms may include drooling, "spacing out," sleeping more and sometimes vocalizations. These vocalizations may include sounds like hiccupping, whooping or even screams. The ferret may also have seizures. Talk to your veterinarian about this disease while your ferret is still young so you know what to do if your ferret develops insulinoma later in life. Insulinoma is usually fatal if not treated.

### What Your Ferret's Behavior Means

**Bouncing Around:** This is also called the Weasel War Dance. This is a sign of excitement and joy. Your ferret is very happy about something and wants the whole world to know it. This can also indicate that your ferret wants to play. Ferrets sometimes do this with such abandon that they bounce into furniture and have even bounced off beds or down stairs. Keep your ferret in a safe and secure area if it tends to do this often.

**Grabbing You With Its Teeth:** This is not biting; it is a firm, but gentle grip on your finger. It usually means that your ferret wants you to follow it. Some ferrets actually try to drag your hand into their cage. They are treating you like a favorite toy. If you try to pull your hand back, though, the ferret may grab you harder, which can be painful.

**Jumping:** If your ferret is by your feet and is jumping up at your leg, this is usually a sign that it wants to be picked up or wants you to play. If you are in the kitchen near the counter where its treats are kept, it might be begging for a treat.

**Kissing:** Just as in humans, your ferret kissing you on the lips can be a sign of affection. It can also mean that your ferret likes the flavor of your lip balm or of the turkey sandwich that you had for lunch.

**Licking:** Most ferrets lick themselves to groom themselves. But if your ferret licks you, it can be indicative of a few things.

1. It could be trying to groom you.
2. It likes the taste of your salty skin or a lotion that you are wearing.
3. It could be getting ready to bite you. No one really knows why some ferrets do the lick-lick-chomp behavior. Perhaps the first two to three licks are the ferret's way to warn you that it wants to be put down. The "chomp" part gets the ferret its way if you ignore the first part of the warning.

**Nipping:** Some ferrets nip to get attention. A ferret might nip your feet to get you to move so it can chase you. It might nip your hand to let you know that it doesn't like something that you are doing.

**Opening Its Mouth While Playing:** This is usually just an indication that your ferret is very excited. A ferret that does this may be more inclined to nip you in its excitement.

**Running Back And Forth:** If your ferret runs to you and then runs away from you and then back again, it could be inviting you to play or asking you to follow it. Maybe your ferret's food or water dish is empty or its toy has rolled under something and it wants you to come and get it out.

This is not a ferret's entire "vocabulary," but it certainly gives you something to ponder. Observe your ferret carefully and add your own list of "words" to ours by adding a comment below!

Mary Van Dahm has worked with exotic animals for more than 40 years, and she has specialized in ferrets for 22 of those years. She currently shares her home with three ferrets, three sugar gliders and her husband, Kurt.

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