



Ness Exotic Wellness Center
1007 Maple Avenue
Lisle, IL 60532
630-737-1281



Ear Mites in Ferrets

Sometimes when you bring home a new ferret you get a something extra you didn't bargain for — ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*). These microscopic parasites can spread to all of your ferrets and even your cat or dog before you ever notice. They can cause your ferret discomfort and, if left untreated, can lead to more serious problems. This is one of the reasons it is important to bring any new addition to your ferret household for a veterinary check-up within a few days of bringing him or her home. (It's also another good reason to quarantine new additions to your animal family.)

Any ferret you bring home from any source (pet store, shelter, or private breeder) can have ear mites. Whether your new ferret is a kit or an adult, he or she should be checked for these parasites. New ferrets are not the only source of ear mites. If your ferret visits a home with other ferrets or even dogs or cats, he or she can pick up ear mites. Your veterinarian can quickly determine whether or not ear mites are present by examining a swab of ear discharge under a microscope.

Ferrets normally have reddish-brown or golden-brown earwax, and some ferrets produce more than other ferrets. If you notice a change in the amount, color, or consistency of the wax in your ferret's ears, bring it to the attention of your veterinarian. Red flags for ear mites are:

- Coffee-ground appearance of earwax
- Scratching at ears
- Shaking the head
- Excessive ear discharge

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's a good idea to have your veterinarian take a look at your ferret's ears.

There are various treatment options for ear mites. Veterinarians usually prescribe ivermectin to be applied topically as drops into the ears. You will have to treat all the ferrets in your home. Since this species of ear mite also affects dogs and cats. Your veterinarian may want you to treat them as well. This is because ear mites can spread easily and rapidly from animal to animal. There are other mite treatments besides ivermectin that are available for dogs and cats, your vet will prescribe as best needed for your pet's ears. Treating ear mites takes a few treatments and then a recheck exam to make sure that they are no longer in the pet's ear. But you need to make sure you finish the full course of treatment your veterinarian prescribes. If you don't, the mites will be back in no time.

What happens if ear mites go untreated? Most commonly your ferret will end up with an inner ear infection or inflammation, which can become painful and lead to neurologic problems. Inner ear infection will require further treatment. Certainly your ferret can become uncomfortable and unhappy. Some ferrets with untreated ear mites and inner ear infection have had irreversible inner ear damage, including hearing loss. Ear mites are reasonably simple for your veterinarian to detect (under a microscope) and treat. If you suspect your ferret has these parasites, address the condition quickly to prevent more serious problems.