
LIVING WITH FERRETS

Long and Short of It

Healthy ears = happy ferret

by Cindy Sooy, Newark, Del.



Scruffing stabilizes the ferret's head to prevent the swab from being pushed into the ear canal. Ferrets with little scruff to hold onto might need two people to clean their ears.

Ferrets are built low to the ground, and they get into and under everything. Consequently, their ears get dirty often. Some wax in a ferret's ears is normal, but a lot of build up, foul smell, or excessive scratching at the ear can indicate an ear infection (caused by bacteria or yeast) or an ear mite infestation. In these cases a trip to the veterinarian is in order.

For an infection the doctor will prescribe and medicated drops to clean and soothe the ear and perhaps antibiotics. Never treat an ear infection without consulting a veterinarian, because there are several different causes of ear infections and each one requires a different treatment. Ear mites, which spread easily to other ferrets and animals, can be treated with medicated drops or a shot of Ivermectin. Ear disorders are best discovered by the ferret owner during regular ear cleaning.

A ferret's ears should be cleaned at least every couple of weeks. Some ferrets need their ears cleaned as often as every week. The more you clean your ferret's ears, the more he will become accustomed to the process, although most ferrets never learn to like it. At first, you may need someone to help, but after awhile you will be able to both scruff your ferret and clean his ears yourself.

You will need cotton-tipped swabs, the smaller the better, and some ear cleaning solution. Do not use water because it can

stay in the ear, and bacteria grow in the warm, moist surroundings of a wet ear. Hydrogen peroxide or one of many available commercial products, which actually help dry the ear, can be used to moisten the swab. Some of the commercial products smell really nice and leave your ferrets smelling great, too.

Scruff your ferret or give him a treat such as Ferretone (8 IN 1 Pet Products, Inc.), Nutri-Cal (Tomlyn Products), or whipped cream. (Ferrets not used to having their ears cleaned will probably need to be scruffed.) While he enjoys his treat, start cleaning. Dip the cotton swab in the ear cleaning solution; squeeze off the excess. Twirl the applicator as you work through the external ear; this helps to get into the many nooks and crannies of a ferret's ear. Do not push the swab into the tiny spaces. Pay attention to the pocket toward the back of the external ear, and make sure to clean this area well. Again, do not push but twirl the damp swab, and it will work its way into this pouch.

In addition, do not go too deeply into the ear. You can damage the eardrum or push the wax further into the ear, compacting it and causing future problems. It is best to clean only the external ear with the swab and allow the cleaning solution to dissolve any wax that is deeper in the ear. Let the ferret shake out any excess solution when you are done cleaning his ears.

Ferrets do not take quickly to getting their ears cleaned, but if it is done often enough, most ferrets will accept it as part of normal hygiene. Your ferret will be healthier and happier with clean ears.



Only a few, basic supplies are needed for cleaning ferrets' ears: cotton swabs, ear cleaning solution, and a treat. A little treat during ear cleaning encourages a squirming ferret to sit still.