

Causes of Scratching & Licking in Ferrets

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Ferrets often scratch when they first wake up. If you sleep near your pets, you can hear the rattle of cage wire when they get up during the night and scratch vigorously. However, if a ferret spends a lot of its time scratching, there is something wrong.

Fleas

[Fleas](#) are a common cause of itching. The best place to check for fleas is between the shoulder blades. There may be flea bites and raw red patches in this area, and thinning of the hair so that any fleas present are easily seen. The skin will need no other treatment than to get rid of the fleas.

Irritation from shampoo

Frequent [baths](#) with harsh shampoos or failure to rinse the shampoo off thoroughly after a bath causes dry, itchy skin. The treatment for this is to give another bath with a mild shampoo (e.g.; oatmeal shampoo) followed by a cream rinse. There are ferret shampoos and rinses on the market that are mild enough to use frequently, but it is important, no matter how mild the shampoo, to rinse until the hair is squeaky clean.

Allergies

Occasionally ferrets develop allergies and will be itchy whenever they contact the offending substances. Allergies are much less common in ferrets than in dogs and cats. Food allergies cause whole body itching. Generic cat foods that contain ingredients such as soybeans and dyes may cause allergies in both cats and ferrets. Sensitivity to rugs or other materials will usually cause the worst reaction at the most frequent points of contact, for instance, the feet. When medications such as ear mite treatment cause hypersensitivity or allergy, only the treated areas are affected. The obvious remedy is to eliminate the offending substance.

Nutrition

Ferrets on poor [diets](#) too low in animal fats will have dry, lusterless coats and itchy skin. Improving the diet will solve the problem. Giving a linoleic acid supplement daily for a week while the diet is being changed will return the skin to health more rapidly.

Mange

Ferrets housed outside or in contact with mangy dogs may be afflicted with [sarcoptic mange](#), which usually affects the feet and legs first, causing raw, red weeping areas. This is rare in pet ferrets housed indoors. It is associated with intense itching, and requires medication prescribed by a veterinarian.

Adrenal gland tumors

Older ferrets (usually over 4 years old) may be itchy all over with no sign of any skin irritation, but in association with hair loss around the rear quarters or over their entire body. They may be lethargic and less playful than usual. Females may have a very swollen vulva, as though they were in heat, even if they are spayed. Males may have increasing difficulty urinating, because the prostate gland obstructs the neck of the bladder. These signs are caused by an [adrenal gland tumor](#). When the tumor is removed, all signs, including the itchiness, will be resolved.