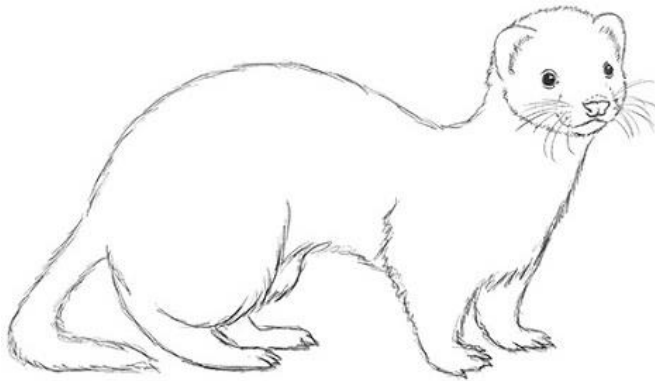


Adrenal Disease in Ferrets

What is Adrenal Disease?



Adrenal disease, also known as adrenocortical disease, is one of the most common diseases seen in domestic ferrets in the U.S. Ferrets are most likely to develop this disease when they are middle-aged. It is thought that 70% of ferrets over the age of 4 may develop this disease at some point in their lives. Adrenal disease is defined as when one or both of the adrenal glands become enlarged as a result of the development of tumors or growths developing on the adrenal glands. Although the exact cause of this disease is largely unknown, it is believed the amount of natural light that the ferret is exposed to, as well as premature spaying/neutering, may play a crucial role.

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What are the symptoms of Adrenal Disease?

There are many different symptoms associated with adrenal disease. Some are seen more frequently than others. The most common symptoms include:

- **Alopecia (hair loss):** The most common symptom observed in ferrets with adrenal disease is hair loss. This is seen in both male and female ferrets. Hair loss commonly begins at the tip of the tail and moves towards the body in a symmetrical pattern. It has been reported that over 90% of ferrets with this disease experience some degree of hair loss. Hair loss can also be the only symptom a ferret with this disease exhibits.
- **Enlarged Vulva (females):** The enlargement of the vulva (genital area) may or may not be accompanied by mucous discharge. The vulva may also appear bruised.
- **Pruritus (itchy skin):** Pruritus is commonly accompanied by hair loss. Pruritus is most commonly observed between the shoulder blades, and the skin may appear red in these areas.
- **Increased Thirst:** It is important to monitor how much water your ferret(s) is drinking. If you notice he/she is drinking more, contact your veterinarian.
- **Lethargy:** If your ferret seems lethargic or more tired than usual, it is important to contact your veterinarian. Lethargy can be a symptom of other problems, as well as adrenal disease.

Other symptoms include:

- **Weight loss and/or muscle deterioration**
- **Partial or complete urinary blockage (males):** Male ferrets may experience partial or complete urinary blockage, though it not very common and is caused by an enlarged prostate. If you notice your male ferret is having trouble urinating, seek medical attention immediately!
- **Enlargement of the spleen:** Enlargement of the spleen has also been documented in older ferrets, however experts are not sure if adrenal disease and the enlargement of the spleen are directly related. Spleen enlargement can be palpated by your veterinarian during an exam.

Treatment options:

There are several treatment options available for ferrets affected by this disease. Consult your veterinarian for further information.

If your ferret is displaying any of these symptoms, or otherwise seems unwell, consult with your veterinarian!

References:

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