



Ferrets & Feeding Your Dog

Ferret question:

Q. I have a 1 year old female ferret. My vet has told me I should get her desexed. Is this really necessary? She lives in my house and will never have access to a male ferret.

A. This is a very good question (insert name of person asking here). Your vet has given you good advice and I would also strongly recommend desexing of your jill (female ferret). The reason for recommending desexing of all female ferrets not used for breeding is to prevent life threatening bone marrow disease.

Female ferrets have a breeding season during which they come on heat. They will stay on heat until they are mated or the end of the breeding season. This prolonged heat (oestrous) results in high sustained levels of the hormone oestrogen. In ferrets, this can bring about oestrogen induced bone marrow toxicity. As a result the bone marrow fails to produce red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. Most affected ferrets will die.

You can rest assured that desexing your ferret will prevent this condition and won't have any adverse effects on her. As an added bonus, desexing will also help reduce your ferret's body odour!

Doggy question:

Q. What foods should I avoid feeding my dog? (again feel free to rephrase to make it sound a bit more interesting).

A. It pays to remember that dogs are not little people. Just because a food or medicine is safe for us humans does not mean it is safe for our canine friends. As an aside, you should never give your pet human medicine unless your veterinarian has told you to. As for food, there are a number of foodstuffs that can make dogs very sick or even kill them.

Foodstuffs that can poison dogs include:

- Chocolate
- Onions and garlic
- Macadamia nuts
- Potato peelings and green looking potatoes
- Rhubarb leaves
- Raisins and grapes

Raisins and grapes are a fairly recent addition to the list of foods that dogs should not be fed. As little as a handful can make a dog extremely ill, resulting in acute kidney failure and possible death.

On a more general note dogs should also not be fed foods that are spicy or fatty. Fatty meals may cause a serious disease called pancreatitis in some dogs. Veterinarians tend to see an increased number of cases of this disease around Christmas as a result of dogs eating large amounts of ham and off cuts. Whilst pancreatitis is a treatable disease,

affected dogs become very unwell and need to be hospitalised. Some severely affected dogs die of this disease. We don't fully understand why some dogs can eat large amounts of fatty food without causing a problem and others get sick, but this is definitely a case of prevention being easier than cure.