Ear Mites in Ferrets

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Any ferret you bring home from any source (pet store, shelter, or private breeder) can have ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*). Whether your new ferret is a kit or an adult, he/she should be checked for these parasites. New ferrets are not the only source of ear mites. These microscopic parasites can spread to all of your ferrets and even your cat or dog before you ever notice. Your veterinarian can quickly determine whether or not ear mites are present by examining a swab of ear discharge under a microscope. Mites can cause your ferret discomfort and can lead to more serious problems if left untreated. 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.

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. Symptoms for ear mites include, coffee-ground appearance of earwax, scratching at ears, shaking the head and excessive ear discharge.

There are various treatment options for ear mites. Veterinarians usually prescribe an anti-parasitic to be applied topically as drops into the ears or on the ferret. You will have to treat all the ferrets in your home. Since this species of ear mite also affects dogs and cats, you will need to treat them as well. Ear mites can spread easily and rapidly from animal to animal. Treating ear mites takes a few treatments and then a recheck exam to make sure that they are no longer present. Make sure you finish the full course of treatment your veterinarian prescribes, otherwise they will return.

If ear mites go untreated, your ferret may develop 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 microscopically and treat. If you suspect your ferret has these parasites, address the condition quickly to prevent more serious problems.