



Splenomegaly in Ferrets

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Splenomegaly is the medical term for having an enlarged spleen. The spleen is an organ located in the abdomen. It has a very large blood supply because one of its primary functions is filtering blood. It also stores blood and manufactures blood cells, in certain species including the ferret. Splenomegaly is very common in domesticated ferrets older than two years of age.

A variety of conditions can cause splenomegaly, including extramedullary hematopoiesis [EMH] (accumulation of a massive number of developing red and white blood cells), neoplasia, infections, heart disease, and idiopathic hypersplenism. Splenomegaly may be an incidental finding, unrelated to any disease state in the ferret. Often an enlarged spleen is present concurrent with diseases such as adrenal disease, insulinoma or other metabolic disorders.

Diagnosis is made on the basis of a few different approaches. It is usually found on palpation during an examination. Care must be taken during palpation, because the spleen may be very delicate in certain conditions and splenic rupture is possible. Radiographs may be helpful to define the size and borders of the spleen and to evaluate for other abnormalities, such as an enlarged liver, an enlarged heart and other system problems. Ultrasound can be performed to evaluate the character of the splenic tissue. Surgical exploratory can provide a direct visualization of the spleen and allow for biopsy for histopathology as well as evaluate the other abdominal organs.

Treatment of splenomegaly depends on the cause. No treatment is typically indicated for EMH; however, if the spleen has become too large, removal may be warranted. Affected ferrets may require blood transfusions and supportive care. Although enlarged spleens are common in ferrets and usually do not require treatment, all cases of splenomegaly should be investigated, and the ferret examined by a veterinarian.