Nail Trimming Tips for Ferrets

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

how to properly clip your ferret's nails

Clipping your ferret's nails is an important part of grooming, but if you've just brought home your first ferret, chances are you're not familiar with how to go about doing this! It is fairly simple, and it gets easier with practice. Below, we will go over the ins and outs of ferret nail trimming to make this grooming procedure quick and easy for you and your ferret.

Why do I have to trim my ferret's nails?

Ferrets cannot be de-clawed, so it's up to you to keep your ferret's nails at the proper length. When your ferret's nails grow too long, he can catch them on bedding, carpets or other fabrics. This could break the nail, tear it, or rip it off completely. Aside from the pain that this would cause your ferret, it would also leave him open to infection. In addition to the possibility of injury, regular nail clipping is also necessary because a ferret's nails will start to curl and grow under if they aren't trimmed regularly. This is very painful for your ferret and can cause him to become lame. Finally, keeping your ferret's nails trimmed will help to keep his nails healthy and strong.

How often do I have to clip my ferret's nails?

You should trim your ferret's nails no less than once a month, though twice a month is better. As with other grooming practices, clipping your ferret's nails should be done as needed. If it seems like he is getting his nails snagged on bedding or they're especially sharp when you're playing, clip them, even if you just did so the week before.

What supplies do I need?

Gather all of your supplies before you pick your ferret up for his nail clipping. Once your ferret is in your lap, you should start clipping right away, as he isn't going to wait until you can locate the nail clippers!

The supplies you will need include:

- Ferret or cat clippers
- Styptic powder, gel, or pads
- FerreTone

Scissor style ferret clippers with a notch at the bottom of the blade, such as the Kaytee Pro Nail Trimmer, are the easiest to use. Our Nail Trim Kit for Ferrets contains everything you will need to properly care for your ferret's nails. You should always avoid using human nail clippers. They pinch the nail before cutting it, which is painful for your ferret. Additionally, they can actually crush your ferret's nail if they aren't strong enough.

Styptic powders, pads, or gels are necessary for when you accidentally cut the nail a little too short, causing your ferret to bleed. This is bound to happen at least a couple of times as you learn how to cut nails, and even occasionally after that, so try not to feel too guilty. Just make sure you have a styptic powder, pad, or gel on hand to stop the bleeding. If you don't have any, cornstarch or flour can also be used, but they aren't sterile, so infection is possibile.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

FerreTone is used to distract your ferret while you're clipping his nails. Other treats can be used, but FerreTone works the best. Once he's had his nails clipped a few times, he won't even take notice of it as long as he has some FerreTone to enjoy.

Where do I cut?

Are you not sure where to cut? Look at your ferret's nail - you will see a small red line inside it. That is referred to as the "quick," and it's what bleeds when you accidentally cut your ferret's nail too short. The "quick" also has nerve endings that, if cut, will cause your ferret pain. (The less frequently you cut your ferret's nails, the longer the quick will become.) Cut your ferret's nail about 1/8" beyond the end of the "quick." When you cut, make sure to cut the nail at an angle that will make the nail tip parallel to the floor when your ferret is standing. This will prevent the nail tip from breaking off if nails become too long.

What are the techniques I should use?

What technique you use to clip your ferret's nails will depend on whether you have a helper or you're doing it by yourself. It is easier if you have someone to hold your ferret while you clip his nails, but with a little practice, it can be done solo.

One person:

1. **Ready** all of your supplies.
2. **Put** your ferret on his back in your lap or on a flat surface covered by an old blanket.
3. **Pour** a little FerreTone on your ferret's stomach. (You will want to wear old clothes when you do this, as your ferret may react the first few times you pour the FerreTone, splashing it around.)
4. **While** your ferret is distracted by the treat, clip his nails. Start with the front nails, as they tend to grow faster than the others. Try to work as quickly and carefully as possible, paw by paw.
5. **When** you're finished, reward him with a little more FerreTone and send him on his way!

Two people:

1. **Have** your helper scruff your ferret, holding the ferret so that his belly is facing you and his paws are hanging down. If your ferret is heavy or it takes you a while to clip nails, have your helper support your ferret's lower half with his other hand so your ferret isn't dangling.
2. **Clip** your ferret's nails, starting with the front paws. Work as quickly and carefully as possible.
3. **Reward** him with a treat.

My ferret hates having his nails cut - what do I do?

There are a few things you can do if your ferret absolutely will not allow you to clip his nails using one of the above methods:

- **Cut** a few nails at a time each day until all nails are clipped. The number you clip in one sitting depends on how long your ferret will tolerate it.
- **Sneak** up on your ferret while he's sleeping, and cut as many nails as possible before he fully wakes up and starts to protest.
- **Wrap** the ferret up in a towel with only his head and the paw you're clipping nails on sticking out. You will need someone to help you with this method. He or she can help distract your ferret with FerreTone while you clip.

If any of these methods seem confusing, or if you are uneasy about where to cut, ask your veterinarian to show you the proper nail trimming technique. If you have a new ferret, a veterinary visit to verify that your ferret is healthy should be one of the first things you do, and veterinarians or veterinary technicians can demonstrate nail clipping and other grooming procedures for you.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*