

West End Animal Hospital

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westendanimal.com

Preventing Adrenal Disease in the Ferret

New evidence suggests that the simple fact of spaying or castrating our pet ferrets may be the root cause of adrenal disease, and age of spaying or castrating is not necessarily a significant factor. Performing the procedure at six to twelve months of age delays the onset of disease, but does not prevent it. Having unaltered pet ferrets is not a practical solution for many reasons.

This unique aspect of ferret physiology is only just starting to be understood. When the ferret's reproductive organs are removed, the adrenal glands take over and begin manufacturing large amounts of sex hormones to make up the difference. This causes enlargement of the adrenal glands, and at this stage is called "adrenal gland hypertrophy." As time goes on, the gland undergoes changes to become a tumor called an "adrenal adenoma" and may also progress to a more malignant tumor called an "adrenal adenocarcinoma."

Work done by leading ferret veterinarians has indicated that ferrets treated with low doses of Lupron, starting at one year of age, tend not to get adrenal disease. The Lupron shuts down the large amounts of sex hormones and stops the cycle. By combining this with melatonin implants, it may be possible to prevent adrenal disease in a large number of ferrets.

With this knowledge, we have implemented a new protocol for prevention of adrenal disease and treatment of early stages of adrenal disease. At one year of age:

Melatonin Blood Screen
Melatonin Implant
Lupron 200 micrograms

Six months after that:
Blood glucose test
Melatonin Implant
Lupron 200 micrograms

The cycle repeats every six months, alternating a full blood screen with a simple blood glucose test.