Ferret Urinary Tract Catheterization

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In ferrets, urinary tract catheterization is most often indicated for neutered males with a urethral obstruction. Obstructions are commonly caused by prostatic enlargement secondary to adrenal tumor hormone production or, less commonly, by urolithiasis. A ferret with a urethral obstruction needs immediate intervention to relieve the obstruction:

• The ferret must be anesthetized for passage of a urinary catheter. Isoflurane or sevoflurane administered via anesthetic mask is the preferred anesthetic agent for sick ferrets.
• With the ferret in dorsal recumbency, the prepuce is gently grasped and the penis extruded (FIGURE 1). The crooked os penis of the male ferret often obscures visualization of the ventral urethral opening, especially when the penis is extended through the prepuce.
• In cases of urethral blockage from gritty material, a tomcat catheter or 24-gauge intravenous catheter (without the needle) can be introduced first to flush through the distal aspect of the urethra and distend the urethral opening (FIGURE 1). Alternatively, a through-the-needle jugular catheter or a 3.0 polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) catheter specifically made for ferrets (Slippery Sam, Smiths Medical) can be used. The smaller catheter can be used to distend the urethral opening to allow introduction of a second, longer catheter (FIGURE 2).
• The urinary collection system can be attached with tape and sutured to the skin as is performed for feline urethral obstruction patients. Be forewarned: it is very difficult to keep the collection system in place once the ferret begins to feel better. The collection tubing often twists and kinks; suturing the urinary catheter to the prepuce and leaving off the tubing and collection bag may be more practical in some cases. An Elizabethan collar is recommended to prevent removal of the system by the ferret.
• Cystocentesis can be performed if urethral catheterization is unsuccessful.

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