

## Suffield Veterinary Hospital May 2012 Patient of the Month

Meet Elf, one of the two gerbils who live with the Eckhardt family of Suffield. The cute photo of Elf below was taken by Lori Radke of Enfield. Owner Peter Eckhardt tells Elf's story:

*"We brought Elf and her sister, Peanut, home on April 28, 2009 from Petco in Enfield. She got her name because of the blatant size difference between her and her sister, Elf being the (much) smaller of the two. A few things about Elf make her notably different from other gerbils, the first being the white, diamond-shaped patch on her forehead. She shares this unique trait with her sister, and it is one of many things that make her one of the cutest gerbils you'll ever meet. Another quality that makes her so loveable is that, when she is picked up, she stands and places her paws on the holder's fingertips so she can survey the area around her. A third attribute of this glorious gerbil is how curious she is. Whenever a new element is put into her cage, she immediately scampers up to it and starts checking it out.*

*Our family first noticed signs of something wrong when my sister, Elsa, saw that Elf was repeatedly picking at her stomach. The next sign was when her sister, Peanut, started scratching at the irritated area as well. Finally, Elf started becoming very sluggish and not leaving her nest of paper towels, shavings, and cardboard. When she was taken to Dr. Anita Sabellico at Suffield Veterinary Hospital, she was diagnosed with a scent gland tumor, something very common in gerbils like Elf. We are very thankful for Suffield Veterinary Hospital for saving Elf's life!"*



Dr Sabellico adds: I think gerbils are the cutest of all the rodents that I see as patients. I don't see as many as I do hamsters, rats and mice because they are very healthy by nature. They are highly sociable and it is recommended to have a minimum of two gerbils living together for their mental and physical health and well being.

Elf was in trouble when she was brought in. There were drops of blood on the bedding and she was not as perky as usual. Her abdominal scent gland, which usually looks like a smooth hairless belly button, was swollen, ulcerated and bleeding. Gerbils communicate by marking various objects with their scent glands. The scent gland is a common site for skin cancer in gerbils. This tumor may appear as an abscess and may have a secondary bacterial infection, but is usually benign in nature. After Elf was given gas anesthesia, the abnormal tissue was removed and the healthy skin was sutured. After-care included a two-week period of keeping Elf separated from Peanut and no exercise wheel privileges until the sutures were removed. She was also given an oral antibiotic to prevent infection.

Because Elf is such a cute and unique gerbil, we proudly present her as Suffield Veterinary Hospital's May 2012 Patient of the Month!

### *Suffield Veterinary Hospital*

Dr. Ann Huntington ♦ Dr. Anita Sabellico ♦ Dr. Dawn Burke ♦ Dr. Griffin O'Connor  
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View Elf and all our Patients of the Month on our web site, [www.suffieldvet.com](http://www.suffieldvet.com)