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The Importance of Routine Wellness Testing

If your pet acts healthy at home, it may not seem like your pet needs an annual visit to the veterinarian, but regular checkups are just as important for our pets as they are for humans. Annual visits to the veterinarian give your pet the best chance at good long-term health, allowing the veterinary team the opportunity to detect and prevent health problems from developing in your pet.

At your pet's annual visit, the veterinarian will perform a physical examination, which is a key component of wellness care for your pet. During the physical examination, your veterinarian will evaluate your pet from nose to tail, looking and listening for abnormalities of the skin, gait, eyes, ears, mouth, heart, lungs, and more. They will also pay special attention to your pet's weight, noting any increases or decreases as compared with prior visits, as unintended weight gain or loss can be an early indicator of disease in pets.

Although the physical examination can sometimes reveal changes in a pet's health, other tests are key in evaluating beyond what the eye can see. These tests, referred to as "routine wellness testing," will be conducted in conjunction with the physical examination with the purpose of looking for early signs of illness as well as establishing a baseline for what is considered "normal" for your individual pet.

What Are the Common Components of Routine Wellness Testing?

Depending on the age and history of your pet, specific wellness testing recommendations may vary. The following are common tests recommended by your veterinarian.

- **Complete Blood Count (CBC)**

This is a blood test that counts the type and number of cells that are circulating in your pet's blood stream. Only a small sample of blood is needed from your pet to run this test. Abnormalities can be detected in the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Although most healthy pets will have normal CBC results, testing may reveal

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early signs of illness that are not yet noticeable at home or on a physical examination. For example, anemia is a condition in which a pet lacks the proper amount of blood cells; this process may show up on a CBC before symptoms are apparent.

• **Serum Chemistry Profile**

The serum chemistry profile evaluates the health of several important organ systems such as the liver and kidneys, and results can serve as an early indicator of certain diseases. Only a small sample of blood is needed for this test. With many diseases, abnormalities can be detected on blood work before signs of illness are seen at home or during physical examination. For example, many cats will develop kidney disease in their lifetime, and early indicators of kidney disease are often seen on serum chemistry before a pet is showing symptoms. Being able to compare chemistry results from one year to the next can also be very beneficial to your veterinarian when it comes to monitoring the function of certain organs (eg, kidneys). Abnormal results may warrant additional testing such as more specialized blood tests, radiography, or ultrasonography. The serum chemistry profile can also reveal other signs of concern through evaluation of protein levels, electrolytes, glucose, calcium, and more.

• **Urinalysis**

Checking a pet’s urine sample can provide information on how well a pet’s kidneys are functioning, screen for a urinary tract infection, raise suspicion for bladder stone formation, and look for evidence of diabetes. Assessing bladder and renal health is a key component of routine wellness testing.

• **Thyroid Testing**

Similar to humans, companion animals can suffer from dysfunction of their thyroid gland, eventually leading to illness. Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid) is a condition most commonly affecting middle-aged to older dogs. Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid) is a condition most commonly affecting middle-aged to older cats. Changes in hormone levels can often be seen prior to any symptoms of clinical illness. Once identified, these conditions can generally both be managed well with medical therapy or other interventions.

Routine wellness screenings are crucial for getting a full picture of your pet’s health. Many medical issues can benefit from early intervention, and, along with a physical examination, routinely running these tests allows your veterinarian to provide the best possible care for your pet.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM MY VETERINARY TEAM
