

Fecal Examinations

Your veterinarian may ask you to bring in a stool sample from your pet for evaluation for parasites. Depending on your pet's lifestyle the veterinarian may ask you to do this on a yearly basis or only if there is a problem such as diarrhea. Puppies and kittens are routinely screened for intestinal parasites since their presence can be devastating to a young animal's health and growth. Some types of intestinal parasites have the potential to also infect humans, especially small children.

Other Screening Laboratory Work

Depending on your pet's particular needs, your veterinarian may suggest additional tests. Some of these are explained below.

Dogs can commonly develop hypothyroidism (low thyroid hormone) which causes weight gain, listlessness and a rough, thinning hair coat. There are several tests available to evaluate your dog's thyroid function.

Dogs can also develop Cushing's syndrome which is over-production of steroids by the body's adrenal glands. This disease can cause your dog to have a potbellied appearance, poor hair coat and excessive thirst and urination. There are several tests available to assess adrenal gland function.

Older cats can commonly develop hyperthyroidism (over-production of thyroid hormone) which causes weight loss, excessive thirst and urination as well as behavioral changes and increased appetite.



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Guide Posts for Your Best Friend's Health



Laboratory Testing

Veterinarians and physicians rely on laboratory information to provide them with an outline of their patient's health. Along with a thorough physical examination and history, laboratory testing can allow your veterinarian to develop a plan to keep your pet in the best health for as long as possible.

Laboratory testing may be advised prior to surgery or when a patient is obviously ill. Laboratory testing may also be advised as a routine screen to detect early disease or establish normal values for the patient during the time they are apparently healthy.

Older animals in particular should begin having routine laboratory screenings on an annual to biannual basis. The American Animal Hospital Association recently recommended starting these screenings when an animal is in the last 25% of their predicted life span based on their species and breed.

Complete Blood Count (CBC)

The CBC measures and evaluates all the types of blood cells. White blood cells fight infection and are present in varying numbers in inflammation, allergy, and tumor processes. Platelets are required for normal blood clotting. Red blood cells carry oxygen throughout the body. All the cells are evaluated for their numbers and appearance and parasites.

Biochemistry Testing (Chem screen)

The biochemistry panel measures electro-

lytes, proteins and enzymes in the body. It allows your veterinarian to evaluate the health and function of the body's various organs.

Kidney

The kidney is a complex organ that has a number of functions. Part of its job is to filter the blood and produce urine to carry out waste products. It also produces hormones that help regulate blood pressure and regulate red blood cell production. The kidney's health is assessed by Creatinine, BUN, Calcium, Phosphorus, and Albumin blood tests as well as by urinalysis. Older cats in particular tend to develop kidney disease and should be closely monitored to detect this problem.

Liver

The liver functions to convert the food that is processed by the intestinal tract into building blocks of proteins and lipids. The liver also functions to convert medications to their active forms and to detoxify the blood. The liver produces bile that is carried to the intestinal tract to help the body breakdown and absorb fats. The liver's health is monitored using blood tests which include ALP, GGT, Bilirubin, ALT, AST, bile acids, cholesterol, albumin and total protein.

Pancreas

The pancreas produces enzymes to breakdown the food your pet eats so it can be absorbed by the intestinal tract. The pancreas also produces insulin that keeps blood glucose regulated. Pancreatic disease can be difficult to diagnose. One of the most common problems is damage to the cells that make insulin. This produces diabetes mellitus. The pancreas can also become inflamed if the

pet's diet is too high in fatty foods. The pancreas is evaluated using amylase, lipase, PLI/TLI and glucose.

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are substances in the body that carry signals across the cells of the body's organs. These substances help maintain the body's water balance and are part of what makes up our bones. Movement of these substances causes the heart to beat and the muscles to contract. Serious abnormalities in electrolytes can cause muscle weakness, mental dullness, seizures and even death. The body's electrolytes consist of potassium, sodium, chloride, calcium and phosphorus.

Urinalysis

A urine sample can be collected by three methods. Your veterinarian may give you a receptacle to catch a urine sample at home, or may ask you to bring your pet into the office with a full bladder so that a sample may be collected by a sterile catheterization or cystocentesis at the office.

Analysis of the urine can provide information about the entire urinary system which includes the kidneys, the ureters (ducts from the kidney to the bladder), the bladder and the urethra (duct from the bladder to the outside of the body). In animals that have not been neutered or spayed, a urine sample may also provide information about the prostate and testicles or the vagina and uterus.

The urine sample is evaluated for the presence of abnormal cells, crystals, pH, protein, blood and glucose. Each sample is evaluated biochemically to detect the presence of abnormal substances as well as by direct examination using a microscope.