

POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

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Why Does My Pet Need An Annual Vet Visit?

Nowadays, your pet can get many of his/her vaccinations every three years, instead of yearly. Does this mean that they should only see their vet when they need their shots or are ill? **The answer is no.** Just as is true with humans, pets need **annual visits** to their vet for a preventative wellness check. This will allow your vet to detect diseases earlier, increasing the chances any disease can be corrected or at least slowed. Your vet is trained to recognize the early warning signals of diseases that many pet owners may miss. Additionally, an annual wellness exam will allow your vet to help you prevent many common illnesses and diseases, and keep your pet healthy as long as possible.

What Happens At The Typical Yearly Exam?

Your Vet Will Probably Check The Following At Your Pet's Annual Exam



- **The nose.** Your vet will check to see if there is a discharge. Rhinitis (irritation and inflammation of the nose) can be a symptom of other diseases.
- **The eyes.** Your vet will look to see if the eyes are dull or listless. This may be a signal of other issues, such as stress or parasites. Some eye infections may be contagious to humans or other animals.
- **The mouth.** Your vet will examine your pet's mouth to see the condition of the mouth, teeth and gums. Unhealthy gums may be caused by anemia. The vet will also check for lesions or tumors in your pet's mouth. Your vet will also check for missing teeth.
- **The ears.** Your vet will examine the ears for mites, odor, and infections. Ear mites are contagious to other animals in your household.
- **The lungs.** Your vet will listen to your pet's lungs. They will listen for abnormal sounds of breathing and congestion. Some causes of congestion are bordatella, distemper and heartworms – all of which are extremely serious.
- **The heart.** Your vet will listen to your pet's heart. The normal heart rate for a dog is 100 to 130 beats per minute. The normal heart rate for a cat is 110-140 beats per minute.
- **The skin and coat.** Your vet will check the skin and coat for various issues. A dull coat, for example, can mean your pet is ill. Your vet will check for cuts and scrapes, fleas, and other parasites that can live on the pet.
- **The abdomen (belly).** Your vet will check for swelling, lumps and pain – all of which can be a symptom of problems. Your vet will also check the internal organs by use of their hands.
- **Back and tail.** Your vet will check your pet's spine to see if there are issues.

- **Paws.** Your vet will look at your pet's paws to make sure there are no cuts, swelling or muscle damage.
- **Weight and temperature.** Your vet will check your pet's weight and temperature to make sure your pet is healthy, and at their ideal weight. An abnormal temperature may be a sign of other issues.
- **Blood & urine.** As your pet ages, your vet will recommend blood and urine tests to further evaluate organ function (or dysfunction) and start appropriate treatment or dietary changes (as needed).

Even So, Why Should We Go? There Is Nothing "Wrong" With My Pet, At Least That I Can See. Right? WRONG. You Should Take Your Pet To The Vet At Least Once A Year, Even If Your Pet Appears Healthy.

Reasons Why You Should Take Your Pet In For An Annual Exam.

- Preventative care for your pet (e.g., heartworm prevention, flea prevention, etc.) is far less expensive than treating diseases once they're out of control.
- Your vet is trained to see the early warning signals of disease that even well-meaning pet owners can miss.
- Heartworm and intestinal parasite testing of your pet needs to be performed annually.
- An annual visit provides you with the ideal opportunity to ask your vet questions about your pet's health.
- Some vets even recommend exams two times a year for older pets (typically over the age of eight).
- This is a great time to pick up your pet's heartworm preventative medication, as well as their flea and tick preventative medicine.
- In dog years, it's like an exam every seven years!
- **Bottom Line:** Taking your pet to the vet annually is **key** to helping your pet living a long and healthy life.

Suggested Reading

- About: Dogs
http://dogs.about.com/cs/disableddogs/a/vet_exam.htm
- PetEducation.com
<http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?cls=1&cat=1384&articleid=228>

Important Note: Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.