

ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF LANESVILLE

1849 Highway 11 Lanesville, IN 47136 (812) 952-3643

The Importance of a Physical Exam

By Dr. Rene Wingerter

Every pet should have a good physical exam once a year. Since your pet ages at a faster rate than you, an exam every year is like you getting an exam every seven years. When your pet gets over 7 years of age, an exam should really be done every 6 months. Although Rabies Vaccinations are important yearly, the main emphasis of your visit should be on making sure your pet is not showing any early signs of disease. The earlier we diagnose problems such as cancer, liver or kidney disease and heart problems, the better chance we have of helping your pet survive longer. Plus, we may be able to find something that is causing your pet pain, and the sooner we treat that, the better.

Although the physical exam by itself is not perfect, it can detect problems such as anemia or jaundice, ear infections, cataracts, skin disease, lumps, swollen lymph nodes, weight problems, heart murmurs, dental problems and certain parasites. If there is sudden weight loss or yellow color to the skin, blood tests can be done to check these out.

As a veterinarian, I have used the yearly Rabies vaccination as an incentive to get the owner to bring their pet in on a yearly basis so I can do what I was really trained for – the physical exam. Sometimes a pet is truly miserable due to an abscessed tooth, infected ears or skin irritation and the owner may be totally unaware. It's not that they are bad owners, just that the changes are so gradual and subtle that they do not see it or they accept it as a part of aging. Also, it is a strong instinct for animals to hide signs of illness the best they can in order to not become a victim of a predator who looks for the weak and ill. This makes early diagnosis of disease particularly hard.

I get my greatest satisfaction from making pets healthier and happier, not from giving vaccinations although vaccinations are very important. Many times the doctor is quick and makes the exam look so easy the owner may not appreciate it.

A good physical includes checking for an abnormal gait, checking the body condition to see if he is too heavy or thin, looking at the hair coat for indications of problems like thyroid disease, poor diet, parasites or allergies. We look at the eyes, ears and nose for

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abnormal discharges and feel the body for hernias, lumps and enlarged lymph nodes. We should also check the gums for paleness or a yellow tinge and the teeth for dental disease. I listen to the heart and lungs for signs of problems. All of this is usually done fairly quickly as we talk and ask questions, but this doesn't mean it is easy or not worth much. A good physical exam can literally save your pet's life.

Also, we use this time to help educate owners about disease prevention. If we never get a chance to talk to you, we can't educate you about things you can do to keep your pet healthier longer.

If you have any questions or would like to schedule your pet for a physical exam, call the Animal Hospital or Lanesville at 952-3643. 🐾