

Annual Physical Exams : What's the Big Deal?

Many health conscious people visit their health care professionals at least yearly and in some cases more frequently along with eating properly and getting adequate exercise. So what about our pets? Are they getting adequate attention in the health maintenance department? Consider that our pets age considerably faster than we do and that once yearly visit is more like five to seven years between annual physicals. A lot can happen in that period of time!



The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) recommends annual wellness exams at a minimum, and as your pet gets older, AAHA suggests that the frequency of visits should be determined on an individual basis, taking into account the pet's age, species, breed and environment. Your veterinarian may suggest more frequent visits depending on your pet's health status.

So what's the deal with annual exams? Why should you take your pet in for a check up when there is nothing wrong? The answer is simple. It is all about prevention and early detection. Many of us know this already. We go to the doctor for annual exams, we see our dentist at least once a year, we take our cars in for regular maintenance, well you get the point. It all about making sure we stay on track in preventing "preventable" disease.

But it's not just about preventable disease either. Early detection of disease is perhaps the most important aspect of the annual physical exam. A lot can happen in that five to seven years of aging that occurs between annual visits. The essential difference between us and our pets is that we can self monitor and self report. We can tell someone when we're not feeling well and we can seek out help if we think things are not quite right. Our pets on the other hand depend on us to see if things are out of whack and get them the help they need.

Now some of us are going to say we know our pets really well and we can tell if they are getting sick or have problems. In fact, some people are very good at this and extremely observant of their pets. Life can be busy though, and even the most astute pet parent can miss the sometimes subtle clues that their pets have

health issues. Annual physical exams and appropriate testing can pick up these things, often before they become full blown disease processes. This can be life saving for some pets. At the very least, we can reduce the effects of disease processes, slow their progression and maintain the quality of life we all know our pets deserve.

Let's look at a real life example, one that we see quite frequently in fact. It is not uncommon for us to detect significant dental disease, perhaps an abscessed or broken tooth or a cavity in a dog or cat on an annual exam. Now, if that same problem was experienced by a child or adult, they would be able to tell someone



and get help for the problem. It is extremely uncommon for the owners of a pet to have noticed there were any problems at all. Their pet is still eating and playing like they always have.

When we fix the problem they notice how much happier their pet appears. That pet has been affected by those dental problems and has been unable to communicate to their pet parent that they have a problem. It is only when they become more seriously ill or extremely painful that they are presented at the hospital. This is not a result of a neglectful pet parent. This is the real life limitation in determining if pets have problems and the reason that veterinary medicine requires a different kind of training than for human medicine. Our patients can't talk (though some might disagree).

So if your busy life has found you procrastinating in getting your pet in for their annual exam make sure you move that item to the top of your To Do List. Make that appointment today and keep your pet on the road to good health.

