

Comprehensive Physical Examinations

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One of the most important components in the evaluation of the health of a pet or in the diagnostic process is a complete and thorough "hands on" physical examination. In veterinary school we were told, "You miss more by not looking than by not knowing," in essence indicating that you will miss potential disease conditions if you do not take the time to take a complete look at the pet. Some veterinarians are eager to perform a battery of blood tests to determine their diagnosis while ignoring the value of a systematic physical examination. So much information can be garnered through careful observation while conducting the exam and then further testing may be implemented to determine the final diagnosis.

The physical should be conducted in a systematic fashion as the pet is carefully evaluated. The veterinarian should rely on their various senses during the examination, obviously sight, sound, touch and smell. For example, with experience, conditions such as a fungal ear infection can be indicated by the characteristic odor in an affected ear. As the physical is being conducted the veterinarian watches for signs of reaction, such as pain or sensitivity when evaluating the joints. As the pet cannot say when something hurts, your power of observations are essential in the diagnostic process. If the veterinarian goes through a physical examination in this careful fashion they can pick up conditions that may not have been even noticed by the owner. That is why it is important to listen to what the owner says the problem is, but do not only focus on what they tell you, still evaluate the entire pet.

A thorough physical examination will give you a great indication as to the pet's state of health. If problems are detected it will aid in the selection of more involved diagnostic testing to further evaluate a disease condition and arrive at a diagnosis.

Additional tests include bloodwork or radiographs to further ensure that a healthy pet externally is indeed healthy inside. If a possible problem with the pet is discovered then the proper tests will be conducted to provide diagnostic answers. This testing should be guided from the initial comprehensive physical examination.

By combining many different diagnostic tools, of which the physical examination is essential, a proper diagnosis, treatment plan and prognosis can be determined, henceforth insuring a long and healthy life for you pets.