



■ Overview

An annual wellness exam is the single most important appointment in your pet's health calendar. Unlike humans who can describe symptoms, pets are biologically programmed to hide illness — by the time signs become obvious, disease is often well advanced. A thorough physical exam by a veterinarian detects problems at the stage when they are easiest and least expensive to treat.

■ Exam frequency matters by age:

- **Adult pets:** annually
- **Senior pets** (dogs 7+, cats 11+): every 6 months
- **Puppies & kittens:** every 3–4 weeks during the first year
- More frequent exams are not excessive — disease moves faster than a calendar year in pets.

■ What Happens During a Wellness Exam

A comprehensive wellness exam evaluates every body system from nose to tail:

Weight & body condition score: Obesity is the most common preventable disease in pets. BCS (1–9 scale) identifies under- and over-weight before it becomes a medical problem.

Eyes, ears, nose & throat: Early detection of cataracts, corneal disease, ear infections, dental disease, and nasal abnormalities.

Cardiovascular & respiratory: Heart murmurs, arrhythmias, and early lung changes are detected by auscultation before they cause clinical signs.

Abdomen & lymph nodes: Organ enlargement, masses, and lymphadenopathy are palpated and graded. Many cancers are first found on routine abdominal palpation.

Skin & coat: Parasites, infections, lumps, and allergic skin disease are assessed. New lumps are measured and recorded to track change over time.

Musculoskeletal & neurological: Muscle mass, joint mobility, gait, and reflexes screen for early arthritis, IVDD risk, and neurological changes.

Dental exam: Dental disease grade (1–4), tooth fractures, and gum health. Most pets have significant dental disease by age 3.

Reproductive system: Intact animals are assessed for pyometra risk, prostatic disease, and reproductive-related cancers.



■ **Exotic pets need annual exams too.** Birds, rabbits, guinea pigs, reptiles, ferrets, and other exotic species benefit from regular wellness visits just as much as dogs and cats. Exotic animals are masters at hiding illness — by the time signs are visible, disease is often well advanced. Seek a veterinarian experienced with your species and schedule annual (or more frequent) checkups.

■ Recommended Annual Diagnostics

Complete Blood Count (CBC)	Adult dogs & cats	Anemia, infection, clotting disorders	Birds, rabbits, ferrets annually
Blood chemistry panel	Adult dogs & cats	Kidney, liver, glucose, electrolytes	Birds, reptiles, rabbits annually
Urinalysis	Adult dogs & cats	Kidney function, UTI, diabetes, crystals	Rabbits, ferrets as indicated
Heartworm antigen test	Dogs annually	Detects adult heartworm infection	Ferrets (similar risk to dogs)
Fecal parasite screen	All pets annually	Intestinal parasites, Giardia, Coccidia	All exotic species annually
Thyroid (T4)	Cats 7+, dogs with signs	Hyperthyroidism in cats; hypothyroid in dogs	Guinea pigs (adrenal/hormonal dz)
Blood pressure	Cats 7+, dogs with heart/kidney dz	Hypertension detection	Rabbits, birds with cardiac signs
Dental probing & radiographs	As indicated	Subgingival disease not visible on exam	Rabbits & guinea pigs (malocclusion)



■ What to Bring & How to Prepare

- Bring a fresh fecal sample (ideally within 12 hours) in a sealed container
- List all current medications, supplements, and flea/tick/heartworm preventives
- Note any behavioral or appetite changes, even if you're unsure they're significant
- Bring vaccine records if you are visiting a new vet — or send them ahead digitally
- **Send previous medical records ahead of time or bring them to the appointment** — prior bloodwork, imaging, and specialist notes help your vet see trends over time
- For cats: withhold food 4–6 hours before to reduce stress-induced vomiting
- Write down your questions in advance — exam time passes quickly
- **Coordinate travel timing** — plan your route and allow extra time so there are no last-minute delays; arrive ideally 30 minutes before your appointment
- **Weather and season awareness** — extreme heat, cold, snow, or storms can affect both travel time and your pet's stress level; factor these in when planning
- **Pre-visit anxiety medications:** if your pet is known to be anxious or fearful, ask your vet about anti-anxiety medications — many are given the night before *and* again the morning of the appointment for best effect

■ **Schedule your pet's next wellness exam today.** Preventive care catches disease early — before symptoms appear, before treatment becomes complex, and before costs escalate. Stay current on preventives: flea, tick, heartworm, and parasite prevention are year-round commitments that directly reduce disease risk. The exam your pet skips is the one that misses something important.

■ Final Summary

Annual wellness exams find disease when it is silent, affordable, and treatable. Every year you skip is a year of undetected change in your pet's health. Schedule the exam — even if your pet "seems fine." Especially then.

■ Related XVC Guides:

- [Vaccination Schedule – Dogs](#) · [Vaccination Schedule – Cats](#)
- [Senior Pet Wellness Checklist](#) · [Preventive Care Timeline by Age](#)
- [Dental Care for Pets](#) · [Pet Insurance Guide](#)



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