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Are Annual Pet Exams Really Necessary?

Patient Risks and Lifestyles Change

The single most important reason for a physical examination is making time to re-view patients' medical histories and to discuss health risks associated with their individual lifestyles and activities.

[Vaccination](#) decisions, food choices, [exercise](#) routines, [parasite control](#) products and behavioral training measures should all be based on each pet's lifestyle. The activities that your pet participates in, the environment where he or she lives and his or her specific health risks all change over time and with age. These issues need to be reviewed with a veterinarian on a regular basis to help ensure long-term wellness.

History Is Important

Understanding what is "normal" for a pet is of great importance when veterinarians are faced with potentially abnormal findings. When patients who have not been to a veterinarian for extended periods of time, the Doctor may wonder things like "Is this pet [losing weight](#)? If so, how much?" and "Are these [blood chemistry levels](#) increasing?"

The unfortunate truth is that if no one has investigated or recorded these values previously, there is no basis for comparison. That makes finding meaningful health trends more difficult. Having routine examinations helps establish a normal baseline for each pet, making it much more obvious when something happens that is abnormal.

Pets Age Quickly

There are a variety of tables and calculators that convert the age of pets to a comparable age in human years. They all say essentially the same thing: Time passes more quickly for pets than it does for people. While small [dogs](#) generally have longer life spans than large [dogs](#), we have found the old adage about one year for people being seven years for dogs and [cats](#) to be a fairly useful, if imprecise, estimate.

We like to pretend that our pets will live forever (because this is a wonderful idea), but the truth is that their lives pass quickly. As a result, what seem like “frequent” visits to the veterinarian to us are not for them.

Pets Can't Talk

Pets don't tell us when they feel sick. Their instincts are often to hide pain and discomfort so as not to appear weak to others. During physical examinations, skin issues, thyroid problems, oral problems, gastrointestinal problems and prostate cancer can be found, just to name a few. Without physical examinations, countless cases of dental disease, skin infections, allergies and arthritis would go undiagnosed and untreated. Serious medical issues like thyroid disease, renal failure and [diabetes](#) would be detected much later in the disease process, leading to lower odds of survival.

Until our pets learn to speak up, getting them examined by a veterinarian regularly makes way too much sense to stop.