

Screening tests for pets uncover hidden conditions early

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Some dogs bury bones, while some cats squirrel away socks. But that's not all our pets can hide; they often hide illness quite well.

From an evolutionary perspective, showing illness or weakness can be detrimental, so over time animals instinctively have hidden illness. Veterinarians are trained to pick up subtle cues that something is not right with your [pet](#), but cannot learn everything through senses alone.

A [physical exam](#) should be performed by a veterinarian at least yearly. For older animals, twice a year is better. During the exam, you might hear terms such as "FeLV/FIV," "fecal," "chem panel," "CBC" or "UA."

What do these abbreviations and acronyms mean? Veterinary medicine uses abbreviations and slang for many recommended tests. You may wonder what these tests are, and why your veterinarian considers them important – especially if your pet seems perfectly fine.

Screening tests provide additional information and can detect potential problems earlier than can be picked up by physical exam alone. Because of their role in providing important – and even potentially life-saving health information – veterinarians at Colorado State University consider [screening tests](#) a cornerstone of preventive veterinary care.

Here are some common tests your [veterinarian](#) might recommend to protect your pet's health or to find a problem early:

- Heartworm test: Heartworms are small parasites that your dog or cat can get from mosquito bites. The larvae, or immature worms, work their way to the large blood vessels of the lung and into the heart, causing damage and interrupting normal blood flow. The American Heartworm Society recommends annual testing and monthly preventive medicine to keep your pets safe. The test uses a few drops of blood and can be performed in the veterinary clinic.
- Complete blood count (CBC): Using a small amount of blood, a CBC tells us about the body's ability to fight infection, produce red blood cells and platelets for blood clotting, and if an infection is present. Deviations from normal values may also indicate [metabolic diseases](#) or the length of time a disease has been going on. Because some animals normally fall above or below normal ranges without disease, it is important to have a baseline test run when your pet is young and healthy.
- Biochemical profile (aka "chem," "chemistry" or "chem panel"): Another type of blood test, biochemical profiles can give us hints about kidney and liver health and give us clues about metabolic diseases like diabetes. Because some animals normally fall above or below normal ranges without disease, it is another important baseline test to run when your pet is young and healthy.
- Urinalysis (UA): As you might guess, this tests looks at your pet's urine. Blood cells and bacteria do not belong in urine. So if these are found, we know there is a problem in the bladder or kidney. A urinalysis can also show us how well the kidney is working or whether your pet has diabetes.
- Feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus test (FeLV/FIV test): Feline leukemia and immunodeficiency are two different viruses that infect cats. Cat-to-cat contact is the most common way your cat may become infected, including mom-to-kitten transmission. Because these viruses interfere with the immune system's ability to fight infection and can be fatal, all

cats should be screened for these two viruses. Since these viruses are good at hiding in the body, all sick cats should be tested as well.

- Fecal flotation (aka "fecal" or "parasite screen"): The Companion Animal Parasite Council recommends annual screening for gut worms. If your dog or cat has parasites, the eggs will be shed in feces and can be found by fecal flotation. The protozoan parasite Giardia can also be found if present. Some worms can be transmitted to people, so it is especially important to keep your pets on regular parasite control and to screen annually.

Along with a physical exam, these tests allow veterinarians to detect disease earlier and to provide treatments that can keep your pet happy and feeling good longer. For more information, visit these websites:

- American Association of Feline Practitioners: www.catvets.com/
- American Heartworm Society: www.heartwormsociety.org/
- American Veterinary Medical Association: www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pa...-Pet-Healthcare.aspx
- Companion Animal Parasite Council: www.capevet.org

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