

The Importance of Preventive Care

PVMA FACT SHEET

Many dogs and cats in the United States do not get the regular preventive care check-ups they need to stay healthy. This trend began long before the recent economic downturn. Pets should receive a veterinary examination at least annually and—for some animals—more frequent visits may be appropriate.

What is Preventive Care About?

Preventive care, or a general wellness visit, is a proactive approach to healthcare. Just like changing the oil in your car can prevent additional problems, regular check-ups with your veterinarian for your pet can catch problems early or prevent them altogether. Depending on the age and health of your pet, your veterinarian may even create a customized plan of preventive care which is tailored to your pet's specific needs.

Regular check-ups are also important because your pet can't tell you when it doesn't feel well. Unlike humans, animals hide pain, so there may not be any outward signs that something is wrong. Regular check-ups allow you to be sure that your pet is in good health.

Check-ups normally begin with a general health evaluation. This includes a thorough history about a pet's breed, age, lifestyle, behavior, and diet. There is also a physical examination to check weight, temperature, pulse, and breathing. All of this information is gathered to assess whether a pet might be sick. The mouth is also examined to see if there is any gum disease or oral problems.

The veterinarian will also ask the owner questions about the pet since its last visit. What are you feeding Fido? Has he been eating and drinking normally? Is Fido still as active as normal? Has he recently lost or gained weight?

The remainder of a wellness visit is usually dedicated to preventive care which can be broken down into a few main categories:

- Diagnostics (heartworm testing, FELV/FIV testing, fecal examinations, etc.)
- Parasite control (heartworms, external parasites, and intestinal parasites)
- Vaccinations (rabies, canine distemper, canine parvovirus, etc.)
- Identification (microchipping)
- Reproductive counseling (spay/neuter)
- A plan for follow-up and the next scheduled visit

What Are the Benefits of a Preventive Care Plan?

- Pets get better, more comprehensive care instead of a hit-or-miss approach. The pet owner and the veterinarian both commit to the healthcare plan and pets get the care they need when they need it.
- Pet owners like having a plan with payments they can work into their budget. People want to take good care of their pets, but not everyone understands that pets get better care and live healthier lives when they go to the veterinarian regularly, not just when something is obviously wrong.
- Regular visits also provide your veterinarian with a better knowledge of your pet's habits, general health and temperament, and can reduce the stress of an office visit on your pet.



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The Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association (PVMA) is an Associate Member of Partners for Healthy Pets. Partners for Healthy Pets is the face of the Partnership for Preventive Pet Healthcare™, a committee of the non-profit American Veterinary Medical Foundation that was created to ensure that pets receive the preventive healthcare they deserve through regular visits to a veterinarian. This alliance of more than 20 leading veterinary associations and animal health companies is committed to a vision of improved overall health for pets.