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Wellness in Dogs

What is wellness testing?

Wellness testing is the term given to a group of tests that is performed specifically to detect signs of early or subclinical disease in a pet that is apparently healthy.

Why do wellness testing?

"...steps can often be taken to manage or correct the problem before irreversible damage occurs."

Pets cannot tell you how they are feeling, and as a result, disease may be present before you are aware of it. If a disease or condition can be detected before a pet shows signs of illness, steps can often be taken to manage or correct the problem before irreversible damage occurs.

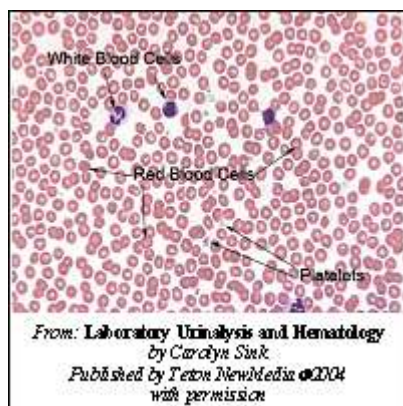
When is wellness testing done?

Wellness testing should be done on a regular basis, and many pet owners combine wellness testing with their annual visit to the veterinarian for their dog's physical examination, vaccination and heartworm testing. Your veterinarian may recommend more frequent testing depending on your dog's age or specific health concerns. Monitoring your pet's health status on a regular basis makes it easier for the veterinarian to detect minor changes that signal the onset of disease.

What is involved in wellness testing?

There are four main categories of wellness testing for the young and middle-aged dog: complete blood count (CBC), biochemistry profile, urinalysis and thyroid

hormone testing. Within each category, relatively simple testing may be adequate. In middle-aged dogs, more comprehensive testing may be beneficial.



Complete Blood Count – This simple blood test analyses the cellular components in the bloodstream. These include red blood cells, which carry oxygen to the tissues, white blood cells, which fight infection and respond to inflammation, and platelets, which help the blood to clot. The CBC provides details about the number, size and shape of the various cells types, and identifies the presence of any abnormal cells. (See handout *Complete Blood Count*).



Biochemistry Profile – This is a series of tests performed on serum, which is the liquid component of blood. These tests provide information about how well the various organs of the body are working, and help to detect the presence of some metabolic diseases. There are tests to assess the liver and kidneys, tests to identify the presence of diabetes, etc. (See handout *Serum Biochemistry*).

"In some cases, a more extensive diagnostic workup may be recommended..."

If minor abnormalities are found on the biochemistry profile, the veterinarian may simply request that you repeat the tests at a later time; depending on the abnormality, this may be in a few days, a few weeks or a few months. In some cases, a more extensive diagnostic workup may be recommended, including an expanded biochemistry profile, or special tests and/or imaging (X-rays, ultrasound).

Urinalysis – Urine evaluation includes an analysis of the chemical components in the sample as well as a microscopic examination of the cells and solid material that may be present. (See handout *Urinalysis*). Urinalysis provides information about how well the kidneys are working, identifies the presence of inflammation or infection in the kidneys and urinary system, and may detect the presence of underlying metabolic disease such as diabetes. Urinalysis is necessary for a complete assessment of the urinary system. It should be performed routinely as part of wellness testing, and is especially important whenever there is concern about kidney function or an underlying metabolic disease.



Thyroid testing – The thyroid gland is like a thermostat, which 'sets' the metabolic rate of the whole body (See handout *Thyroid Testing*). The most common thyroid disease in the dog is *hypothyroidism*, which occurs when the thyroid gland does not produce enough thyroid hormone. The function of the thyroid gland should be tested routinely in middle-aged to older dogs, or if a dog of any age shows symptoms such as unexplained weight gain, lack of energy, recurring skin or ear infections, or hair loss on the body and tail.

Summary

Wellness testing is a simple and effective way of monitoring a dog's health. Early detection and correction of medical problems will help to ensure that your pet will have a long, healthy and active life.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Kristiina Ruotsalo, DVM, DVSc, Dip ACVP & Margo S. Tant BSc, DVM, DVSc © Copyright 2009 Lifelearn Inc. Used and/or modified with permission under license.