Small Pet Wellness Exams: What to Expect During your Veterinary Visit

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We all know that preventing disease or catching it in its early stages is far better than treating it once it has had time to progress to a more severe stage. Preventive health care on a regular basis will help you do just that, and save you and your pet needless suffering and a larger financial burden. Just as annual physical exams are recommended for humans, they are recommended for our pets as well.

Even our cars get regular tune-ups!

Each small pet should be examined and their husbandry and diet reviewed by a veterinarian at least once a year. Geriatric animals and those showing signs of disease often need more frequent exams.

History

During the annual physical exam you should review these aspects of your pet's husbandry, diet, and health with your veterinarian:

- How long you've owned the animal
- Where you purchased the animal
- What other animals you have in your household; if they are cagemates; and what is their health status
- Housing, including cage size and type, bedding, and cage furniture; if and how often the pet leaves the cage; if the pet goes outside
- Cage hygiene - frequency of cleaning and cleaning supplies used
- Environmental temperature
- Light sources and frequency of bulb changes
- Relative humidity of the cage, and water/humidity sources
- Typical diet including brand names, if applicable; what and how much is offered and what and how much is eaten; feeding frequency
- Description of the droppings - color, amount, and consistency
- Types of toys offered; any history of chewing household items
- Use of medications - type, brand name, and dose
- Use of nutritional supplements (vitamins or minerals) - type, brand name, and dose
- Use of pesticides or any other treatments - type, brand name, and dose
- Exposure to other small pets or wildlife (at shows, boarding, traveling)
- Exposure to potential toxins (cleaning supplies, second hand smoke, heavy metals, pesticides)
- Reproductive history
- Any behavioral changes
- Any medical problems noted (discharges, changes in stool, history of ingesting foreign objects, lameness, injuries, lumps or bumps, etc.)

Do not be surprised if your veterinarian spends more time talking with you than he/she does examining your small pet. Most diseases in small pets are related to husbandry and nutritional problems, so it is vital that these be reviewed with you carefully. During your discussions, be sure to ask any questions you may have regarding your pet's health and care. Now is the time to learn from your veterinarian's expertise.

Veterinary examination and testing

Usually the veterinary examination will include:

- Recording of the weight of the pet
- Observation of the animal's posture, movement, and attitude
- Physical examination including eyes, ears, nose, mouth and teeth, skin, limbs and paws, genital and anal area, and tail
- Palpation of the abdomen and lymph nodes
- Ausculation of the heart and lungs
- Fecal examination for parasites
- Complete blood count (and chemistry profile, depending upon the age and species of pet)

By providing your veterinarian with as much information as possible, and having your small pet examined regularly, you can help your pet remain in top condition, healthy, and happy. Remember, prevention is key!

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