

Wellness Testing in the Dog

What is wellness testing?

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

Why do wellness testing?

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, we can often take steps to manage or correct the problem before irreparable damage is done.

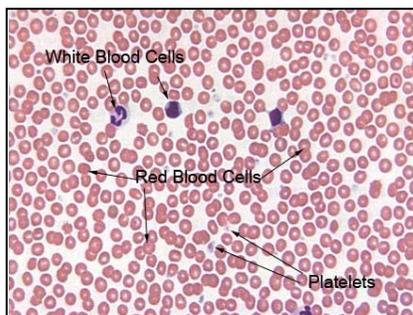
When is wellness testing done?

Wellness testing is usually done once yearly, and many pet owners combine wellness testing with their annual visit to the veterinarian for their dog's physical examination, vaccination, or heartworm testing. Your veterinarian may recommend more frequent testing depending on your dog's 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, the veterinarian will determine how extensive the testing should be. In younger dogs without noticeable health complaints, relatively simple testing may be adequate. In middle-aged dogs, more comprehensive testing may be beneficial



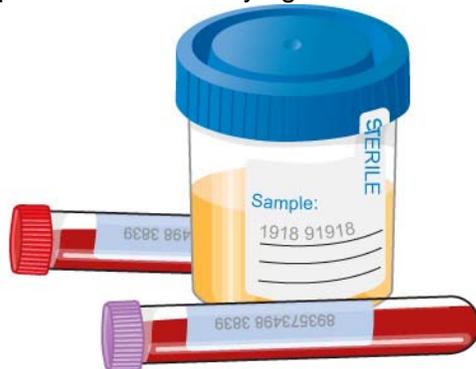
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Complete Blood Count - This simple blood test analyses the cellular components in the bloodstream. These include red blood cells, which carry oxygen to the tissues, white blood cells, which fight infection and respond to inflammation, and platelets, 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 a 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, kidneys, and pancreas, tests to identify the presence of diabetes, and so on. (See handout *Serum Biochemistry*). 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 - Urinalysis involves an analysis of the chemical components in urine, as well as a microscopic examination of the cells and solid material present in urine (See handout "*Urinalysis*"). Urinalysis provides information about how well the kidneys are working, identifies the presence of inflammation or infection, 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 underlying metabolic disease.

Thyroid testing - The thyroid gland is like a “thermostat”, and it “sets” the metabolic rate of the whole body (See handout *Thyroid Testing*). The most common thyroid disease in the dog is called *hypothyroidism*, which occurs when the thyroid does not produce adequate amounts of thyroid hormone. The function of the thyroid gland should be tested if your dog exhibits unexplained weight gain, lack of energy, recurring skin or ear infections, hair loss on the body and tail, or has high cholesterol levels in the blood.

Summary

Wellness testing is a simple and effective way of monitoring your dog’s health. Early detection and correction of medical problems 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.

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