

## Bloodwork: Why do we do it and what does it mean?

Just as your physician would recommend certain tests, such as cholesterol screening, regular blood testing and blood pressure checks, for you, the American Animal Hospital Association recommends that annual screening tests should be performed on your pet for baseline levels and early detection of disease. This is important for all ages but especially when your pet reaches “middle age,” which ranges from 4 to 7 for most pets. Remember, your pet ages more rapidly during the golden years, and the risk of developing a chronic condition or serious disease also increases. So why are annual laboratory tests important for all ages?

They help establish “baseline” values for comparison with future test results, and help your veterinarian make preventive care recommendations to delay the onset or progression of certain diseases.

### Screening Procedures for Healthy Pets

The most important screening tests for healthy pets should include:

- **Complete blood count (CBC).** This test identifies red and white blood cell and platelet disorders and helps in the diagnosis of serious problems such as infection, anemia and bleeding problems. It may provide further insight into the status of your dog’s immune system.
- **Serum chemistry profile.** This test is used for assessing or evaluating the function of the liver (ALT, ALP, AST, GGT, T.Bil, albumin), kidneys (BUN, creatinine, phosphorus), and pancreas (amylase, lipase and blood sugar). Measures protein levels which can indicate dehydration, blood loss or inflammation and monitors cholesterol and triglyceride levels.
- **Electrolytes.** This test helps detect disturbances in potassium, calcium, sodium and chloride to identify renal failure, dehydration and some endocrine diseases.
- **Fecal analysis.** A fecal sample will be checked for evidence of parasites, unusual bacteria and protozoa. The presence of these infectious organisms may cause no clinical signs or signs from mild diarrhea to severe intestinal tract changes. Many of these organisms can even be contagious to humans and therefore the Centers for Disease Control recommend we test at least annually.
- **Heartworm testing.** Although Las Vegas is a low risk area for heartworm disease, the incidence of this potentially fatal disease is rising. We recommend that all pets receive annual heartworm testing and pet’s travelling outside of Las Vegas should be placed on a monthly preventative.

### For Senior Patients testing should include:

- **Thyroid hormone levels.** This test is used to help evaluate abnormal thyroid function. In a dog low thyroid levels may cause increased weight gain, poor hair coat or lethargy. Cats that develop increased thyroid levels may display weight loss, increased appetite, poor hair coat and can contribute to significant heart and kidney disease over time.
- **Urinalysis.** A urine sample will be checked for evidence of diseases such as urinary tract infections, crystals or stones and diabetes. It is also one of the earliest ways to detect kidney disease therefore

sometimes additional tests are needed for older patients including Urine Protein:Creatinine ratio or perhaps Urine Albumin both which are both used to determine kidney function better.

- **Blood Pressure.** Hypertension can be an indication of other underlying diseases. If left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to heart failure, kidney failure and blindness.
- **Radiographs.** Because a physical exam and blood tests cannot always tell your veterinarian exactly what is going on inside your pet, radiographs can help to assess the size, shape and structure of some organs. Some hidden problems that radiographs can reveal are enlarged heart, cancer of the chest or abdomen, bladder stones, and liver, kidney or intestinal changes.
- **Other tests.** Your veterinarian may recommend additional testing based on your pet's age, history or results of other testing. Additional tests may include echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart), abdominal ultrasonography, intraocular pressure testing for glaucoma, adrenal gland testing, or specialized liver, pancreas, and small intestine function tests.

### Preventive Health Recommendations

Important preventative health care topics that we may discuss with you include:

- Dental and oral care
- Diet and nutrition
- Weight control
- Exercise guidelines to maintain your pet's mobility
- Parasite control
- Vaccination risk assessment
- Maintenance of your pet's mental health
- Environmental conditions for maintaining health

Your pet will give you loyal, lifelong love and companionship. With a little extra care and attention, we can help your pet live a happier, fuller, and longer life.