**What is a wellness examination?**

**From Head to Toe**

Your veterinarian will exam your pet. Your veterinarian will use a stethoscope to listen to your pet’s heart and lungs for early signs of heart and respiratory disease. They will feel your pet’s abdomen for abnormalities, including enlarged organs, masses or painful areas, to detect problems with the stomach, intestines, kidneys, liver and other organs. Your veterinarian will also examine your pet’s legs and feet and the condition of your pet’s joints, muscles, lymph nodes and nose. Your veterinarian may recommend additional testing to diagnose or verify a health problem if he finds any abnormalities during your pet’s examination. They will take your pet’s temperature, pulse, respiration rate and body weight. If your pet has lost weight since his last physical exam, he may be experiencing the early stages of metabolic disease, such as kidney disease or diabetes. If your pet has gained weight since his last exam, your veterinarian will work with you to develop an appropriate diet and exercise plan to return your pet to a healthier weight.

Your veterinarian will inquire about your pet’s history. This is the time to bring up any unusual behavior that you have noticed in your pet, including:

* Coughing
* Diarrhea
* Eating more than usual
* Excessive drinking of water, panting, scratching or urination
* Vomiting
* Weight gain or weight loss
* Does your pet have trouble getting up in the morning?
* Does your pet show signs of weakness or unbalance?
* Does your pet show an unwillingness to exercise?

Depending on your pet’s lifestyle and age, and other factors, your veterinarian may also ask about your pet’s exposure to fleas, ticks, heartworms and intestinal parasites. He or she will develop an individualized treatment and/or preventative plan to address these issues.

**Ears**

Your veterinarian may ask if your pet has been shaking his head or scratching at his ears, and if you have noticed an odor coming from your pet’s ears. Your pet’s ear canals protect his inner ear, but can also become a home for parasites and other foreign objects. Your veterinarian will closely examine your pet’s ears to make sure they are healthy.

**Eyes**

Eye examinations often reveal many health issues, including anemia, infections, glaucoma, cataracts, high blood pressure, jaundice, kidney problems and allergies, in addition to eye injuries and ulcers. Observation of the inner structures and outward appearances of the eyes will be included in an eye examination.

**Mouth**

Your veterinarian will inspect your pet’s gums, teeth, tongue and palate for tartar buildup, dental abnormalities, fractures, loose teeth, tumors, infection and other problems. Bad breath, tooth loss professional teeth cleaning and prevention of periodontal disease will be discussed by your veterinarian.

**Heart and Lungs**

**Reproductive Organs**

If your pet has not been spayed or neutered, your veterinarian may discuss with you the many health benefits of spaying/neutering beyond just birth control. Your veterinarian will check your pet’s reproductive system for swellings, discharges and breast lumps.

**Skin**

Your pet’s skin is his largest organ and a good gauge of his health. Your veterinarian will check your pet’s skin and hair for fleas, ticks, other external parasites, tumors and wounds, as well as signs of allergies, infection, warts and tumors.

**Vaccination**

Vaccinations are one of the most important preventive measure you can take for the health of your pet. Dogs can be immunized against distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, parvovirus, coronavirus, Bordetella, rabies, and Lyme disease. Cats can be immunized against feline panleukopenia (distemper), rabies, feline rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, chlamydia, feline leukemia, and FIV.

How frequently you should have your pet vaccinated against certain diseases depends on many factors, so talk to your veterinarian to understand what is recommended for your pet’s unique environment and lifestyle. Do not underestimate the importance of taking your pet to the veterinarian for regular wellness examinations. These regular examinations will help your pet live a longer and healthier life.