

UNDER THE WEATHER

Check on Wellness

"I'm tired of seeing sick dogs and cats," grumbled the junior-most vet in the team, "I signed up to play with kittens and puppies," he joked. I saw the waiting room. One cat in renal failure, a dog with heart disease, an old and arthritic dog and another waiting to show a large tumour on his leg. "You're right in a way," I said. If all these patients had come for wellness checkups, their problems would have been delayed or avoided.

Age, we all must. Our pets, too, sadly. Add to that their short lifespan, and their age related decline occurs very rapidly. Knowing that, there is a lot we can do to help our four-legged family members. It starts with being aware of their life stages and their needs at every stage. As puppies, they need good nutrition to grow to their optimum height and weight. Take an appointment with your vet to understand their unique nutritional requirements – they are carnivores, and their needs are quite different from ours. At this stage, also discuss spaying or neutering with your vet – if you aren't planning to breed from your pet it may make sense to spay or neuter your pet to avoid mammary tumours, pyometra and prostate tumours when they are older.

At around two years, your pet is in the prime of health. It is at this age that a baseline health checkup is ideal, since you can establish your pet's normal values and use it as a reference in his later years. This should include a basic blood profile, an ECG and a chest X-ray. Of course, you should always request for a full physical examination by a vet at the time of wellness checkups, since that can throw light on things you may have missed, like tartar buildup.



**DR SANGEETA
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Four years is when dogs become middle-aged, and a wellness checkup should be done at this time. Your vet will tell you if your pet needs any changes in diet depending on his/her weight, whether dentistry is needed and if all systems are working normally. Discuss his/her diet and find out if any supplements need to be added. Make sure you keep a watch on your pet's voiding habits and mention any changes to the vet. The larger breeds start getting early degenerative changes in their joints and heart at this stage, so a complete cardiac checkup and hip X-rays should be included in the wellness checkup. Small breeds tend to have their own set of problems (like urinary calculi), so your vet will advise necessary tests (like urine tests) to rule those out.

At eight years, like it or not, your pet officially becomes a senior citizen. It is at this stage that you can really make a difference in your pet's health if you are diligent and proactive. Make an appointment twice in a year for a complete checkup. One of these can be at the time of annual vaccination, and one in between. This includes a comprehensive blood work-up, a

urine test, chest X-rays, blood pressure measurement, ECG, and a complete physical examination. Other tests are customised according to the findings on these tests. Once the results are out, your vet will suggest small changes depending on your pet's health and his/her reports. Any deterioration in the liver, kidneys, heart or joints, if caught early, can be managed much better by your vet, and will help your pet lead a full and healthy life.

It is delightful for a vet to see a well-looked after pet come in before major problems set in, so call your vet to book a wellness appointment soon!




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