

## The Importance of Physical Examinations

It's that time of year again. Time to take your cat to the veterinarian for his annual examination. But maybe you're thinking that you might skip it this year. After all, he isn't sick. Maybe you will just put it off until next year – what could it hurt?

Actually, delaying an annual physical exam *can* hurt. Annual physical exams are an important part of providing optimal health care and the best longevity for your beloved companion. Cats age quickly and they are unable to tell us if they are feeling a little off. Remember, it may be one year in your life but that can be about 5-10 comparative years in your cat's life. A lot can change in that much time.

Sometimes, cats can be ill for weeks and you are unaware of it. This may not be from a lack of monitoring or caring; your cat just hides his illness until it is so far advanced he has no choice but to show signs of disease.

Your veterinarian has special training and experience in detecting subtle illness in pets. Listening to the heart can detect murmurs. Increased lung sounds may indicate early illness. Abdominal palpation may reveal pain in certain areas, abnormal size and shape of various organs or even tumors. Checking out the eyes can detect early signs of cataract or other ocular problems. Ears may be in need of cleaning or medication. Dental disease may be detected as well as signs of allergies or skin problems. It's easier for someone who doesn't see your pet every day to detect lumps and bumps that you may not have noticed. Comparing annual weights, too, can determine if your cat is heading down the path to obesity or is slowly losing weight.

As a cat reaches middle to old age, annual physical exams become even more important. Certain problems that you may simply attribute to "old age," and just something you will have to live with, may be signs of underlying disease and may be very treatable. Annual physical exams also give you an opportunity to ask your veterinarian any questions you may have about your cat's health. Your veterinarian may recommend certain additional tests to determine overall health based on physical exam findings or may have suggestions for improving the quality of your cat's life. Remember, the primary goal for your veterinarian is to keep your cat healthy and provide the best care available. Your veterinarian cares a great deal about your cat – almost as much as you.

A physical examination is not just a chance for your vet to see how cute your cat is; a thorough exam can pick up on a variety of illnesses and prevent potential catastrophic disease. By finding, diagnosing and treating these problems early, your cat will live a much healthier and longer life.