

The Snout-To-Tail Wellness Assessment

Print this form and use it as a guide, checking each item and writing notes as you do your Wellness Assessment.

- To make the process an enjoyable one for you and your pet, and also to allow you to focus on the assessment, you should perform it in a quiet place that is free from distractions for you and your pet. Your pet can be sitting or lying down, whatever position is comfortable for you and your pet, and allows you to purposefully touch your pet from snout to tail.

- Start at the **snout**, and both touch and examine your pet's nose. It's not true that the nose should be cold and wet. It should not be so wet that there is a discharge, or so dry that it's cracked. Then run your fingers over the muzzle and check for any lumps, bumps, sores, or abrasions.

- Check inside your pet's **mouth**. Unless you have a pet whose gums are naturally dark in color, such as a Chow, the gums should be bubble gum pink. The teeth should be white, with no chipped, cracked, or missing teeth. And, there should be no bad odor. Bad "puppy breath" is not normal.

- Next check the **eyes**. They should be clear with no discharge, should track movement. Look for any differences between the two eyes. Are the whites of the eyes white, or are they red or yellow? Are the pupils pinpoint, dilated, or unequal?

- Next move to the **head** and check the skull, along the sides of the head, and back over the neck. Do you feel or see any bumps, masses, or sores? Does your pet react at all as if any spot is tender?

- The **ears** are next. They should not have any discharge or odor, and should not be painful to the touch. Compare the ears to each other. Do they look at all different from their normal appearance (eg. If both ears are normally erect, is one now laying down).

- Now check the **back/spine**. Run your hand along the full length of your pet's spine down to the base of their tail with a firm, gentle pressure. Do you feel any lumps or bumps? Does your pet give any sign of discomfort?

- Now move your hands to the **chest and ribs**. You should be able to easily feel the ribs under the fur. "Love Handles" are not a good thing in our pets. With your hand on your pet's chest, you can check both their breathing rate, and quality. Feel the rise and fall of their chest and count the number of breaths per minute. Normal breathing rate for dogs ranges from 10-30 breaths per minute; for cats it's from 20-30 per minute. You need to determine what is normal for your pet at rest, as it can fall anywhere within the "normal" range. Their breathing should be smooth, easy, and rhythmic.

- After checking the chest and ribs, check each **front leg and paw**. Note the range of movement, and any sign that there is pain when the limb is moved. Check the claws, including the dew claws. None should be cracked, split, or painful. Check the pads of the feet and between the toes. Many pets do not particularly like to have their feet touched, so you may have to go slowly on this part, and even bribe your pet with a treat while examining their feet.

- Next move to the **hind legs and paws**, and repeat the exam you did on their front legs. While examining their rear legs, that's the best time to check their pulse at the femoral artery. The **femoral artery** is located on the inside of the thigh of either back leg. The normal **pulse rate** for an adult dog can vary between 60-140 beats per minute, depending on the size and even the breed. Cats can have a pulse rate between 110-240 beats per minute. Given the wide range, it really is important to establish what the normal resting pulse rate is for your pet.

- After examining the hind legs/paws, use the flats of your hands and palpate the **abdominal area**. The abdomen should not be sensitive, painful, hard, or rigid. You also should check your pet's **mammary glands and genital areas** for any signs of discharge. And, the **anal area** should not have any accumulation of feces or debris. You should also get in the habit of **taking your pet's temperature** using a digital, rectal thermometer. The normal temperature for dogs and cats ranges from 100.4° - 102.5°. Again, it's important for you to know just what is "normal" for your pet. If you are at all unsure how to properly take your pet's temperature, ask your vet, or take a Pet First Aid class.

- The final step of the assessment is to do an overall examination of your pet's **tail, skin, and coat**. Check the tail for any deformity or sign of pain. Check their coat for quality, color, texture, or any excessive shedding.

If you do discover any abnormalities or changes from one assessment to the next, it is advisable that you discuss your findings with your vet as soon as possible so that they can determine what, if any, treatment or follow-up care is warranted.

This information was composed by Karen Sable, owner of Pet Emergency Training, LLC, Pet First Aid Instructor in the Pittsburgh area. Karen is also a trained responder with several national animal response/rescue teams. Visit her website at www.pghpetemergencytraining.com.

Flyer downloaded from The Creative Cat, www.portraitsofanimals.wordpress.com, courtesy Bernadette E. Kazmarski.

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