

SMALL MAMMALS: THE ANNUAL CHECKUP

Many owners of small mammals (rodents, rabbits, chinchillas, sugar gliders, ferrets, hedgehogs) are surprised to learn that all pets need at least an annual checkup. A number of exotic pet



veterinarians actually recommend checkups at least twice a year. There are 2 reasons for this: first, since most pets including small mammals don't live as long as people, getting a checkup only once a year is like you going to your doctor every 5-10 years. This is too long to wait to find out if something is wrong with your pet. Second, early detection and treatment of disease is very important in giving your pet the best prognosis for recovery from a disease, and is less expensive than treating a serious problem. Regular veterinary care is necessary in order to ensure your pet lives a long, healthy life.

Parts of the Small Mammal Checkup

While each doctor has his own protocol on what is done during the annual or twice yearly checkup, the following tests may be recommended to keep your pet healthy. Many exotic pet veterinarians recommend performing some or all of these tests under short-acting gas anesthesia, using an anesthetic like isoflurane or sevoflurane, depending upon the species of pet and temperament of the pet. Most small mammals can be safely anesthetized for the short period of time needed to perform the diagnostic testing. It is usually much easier and safer to perform procedures on exotic pets under anesthesia, as they are not stressed out when anesthetized and stress is a major factor in exotic pets dying when handled.



Physical Examination - Every visit starts with a thorough physical examination. During the physical, the doctor will record your pet's weight, general appearance, and mobility. He will palpate (feel) various parts of the pet's body. Any abnormalities that are noted or changes that have occurred since the previous visit may indicate the need for specialized testing.

Blood Testing - Just as your regular visit includes blood testing, so does a checkup for pets. Blood testing can include a complete blood count (examining the red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets) and serum biochemical profile (which looks at various organ enzymes.)

Fecal Analysis - Microscopic examination of the feces allows detection of parasites (coccidian and worms.)

Microbiological Testing - Occasionally additional tests such as a culture and sensitivity or a skin scraping may be needed to determine the cause of various problems in small mammals.

Radiological Testing - Using X-rays the doctor can examine your pet's body for abnormalities in the size, shape, and position of body organs; screen for masses such as tumors or granulomas; look for abnormal fluid accumulation; and check the bones and joints.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM
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