

## 6. Pet Health Exam Guide and Worksheet

This section includes vital statistics information. It explains what is considered normal and what is not – and it clearly describes what you should watch out for. Use this as a quick reference guide while you are performing your at-home exam.

This section is single spaced for ease of printing. Keep one copy of this section in an easily accessible location, and one with your Pet First Aid Kit.

### Heart Rate

Normal resting rates (bpm = beats per minute):

Cats:	150-200 bpm
Small dogs:	90-120 bpm
Medium dogs:	70-110 bpm
Large dogs:	60-90 bpm

The pulse should be strong, regular and easy to locate.

To measure your pet's heart rate, place your hand on the left side of your pet's chest behind the elbow. You should be able to feel the beats of the heart. Count the number of beats for 15 seconds and multiply by 4, this will give you the number of beats per minute. Try to take several readings to give you an average heart rate – it's also good practice.

In addition, try to find your pet's pulse using the **femoral artery**. It is located in the groin area where the hind leg meets the body. Press firmly with two fingers; you should easily feel the beats. In an emergency, you may need to find a pulse on your pet - the best place is the femoral artery.

**Note:** Normal heart rate for an adult dog can be 70–180 bpm. Smaller dogs have a faster heart rate than larger breeds, and with puppies, normal heart rate can be as high as 220 beats per minute. Normal heart rate for an adult cat can be 120–240 bpm, and with kittens normal rates can be 200–300 bpm.

### Temperature

Your pet probably has a range of what is normal for him or her. Temperature is not going to be the same everyday; take several readings for an idea of what is normal for your pet. Lift your pet's tail - this will help keep your pet from sitting down. It is also easier if you have someone holding the 'pretty end' for you.

Using a rectal thermometer, lubricate the end with KY Jelly or petroleum jelly and insert the thermometer into the rectum of your pet, about halfway. After 3

minutes, you can remove the thermometer and write down the readings.

Normal temperature ranges (both Cats and Dogs): 99 degrees F to 102 degrees F (38-39.5 degrees Celsius).

**Anything below 95 degrees F is an emergency:** call your veterinarian and begin to warm your pet immediately.

**Anything above 106 degrees F is an emergency:** call your veterinarian and begin to cool your pet immediately.

If your pet's temperature is moderately high or low you may suspect something is wrong. In this case, perform a more thorough exam.

### **Respiratory Rate**

Measure your pet's respiratory rate by counting the number of breaths for 15 seconds and multiply by 4. This gives you the number of breaths per minute.

Dogs usually breathe 10 – 30 times a minute, cats 10 – 40 times a minute. A panting dog will breathe much faster, up to 200 times a minute. **Any open mouth breathing or panting in cats should be considered an emergency.**

### **Gum Color**

The gum tissue should be nice and pink; if your pet's gums are pigmented try to find a spot that is non-pigmented, or use the mucous membrane tissue in the groin area. If your pet's mucous membranes are anything other than pink, something is wrong and you should call your veterinarian.

In general: pale pink or white mucous membranes could spell shock or anemia, blue generally means your pet is having trouble breathing and not getting oxygen, yellow mucous membranes generally means your pet is jaundice and having liver problems, and bright red mucous membranes could mean heat stroke or carbon monoxide poisoning.

### **Capillary Refill Time**

This will help you judge your pet's blood circulation. In the non-pigmented area of your pet's gum tissue, press your finger against the tissue and release. You should see a white spot where your finger was. Time how quickly the white spot becomes pink again.

The normal range for capillary refill (when the color returns) is from 1 – 2 seconds. **2 – 4 seconds generally means shock or dehydration, more than 4 seconds is an emergency.**

## Hydration

To check your pet's hydration, grasp the skin at the back of the neck and pull up. The skin should snap back rather quickly; the longer it takes to retract, the more dehydrated your pet is. If the skin remains standing up, then your pet needs to be re-hydrated. **In severe dehydration you should call your veterinarian immediately.**

You can also check hydration by pressing a finger to your pet's gums. If they are sticky or tacky then your pet is dehydrated – in this case, call your veterinarian. In general, senior cats will normally be a little dehydrated - you may want to check with your veterinarian for what is considered normal for your senior cat.

## Weight

If your pet is small, you can weigh him/her yourself: first weigh yourself while holding your pet and then without, then subtract for your pet's weight. For larger dogs, I would go to the veterinary clinic and ask to use their scales - there is generally no charge to do this.

Weight loss can alert you to a problem internally with your pet. For example, kidney disease, diabetes, and hyperthyroidism all list weight loss as a symptom. **If you have noticed weight loss, call your veterinarian immediately.**

## Assessing Responsiveness

Healthy dogs and cats are alert and responsive to whatever is happening around them. You can gauge this based on how they interact with you – see how they respond when you clap your hands or move suddenly towards them.

A key window into the brain (and responsiveness) is through the eyes. Briefly shine a bright light into the eyes to see that the pupils respond and constrict. The room must be a little dark at first, so that the pupils are initially enlarged. Try this on your pet in a darkened room - you will see the pupils constrict immediately with a bright flashlight.

**Putting together your pet's health chart does not replace an exam done by a veterinarian.** It is meant to be used to learn what is normal for your pet so you are better equipped during an emergency, or if you think your pet is not feeling well. If you take your pet's vital signs at home, you can relay more information to your pet's veterinarian – this will help them prepare for you when you arrive with your pet during an emergency.

## Worksheet

Please use the worksheets on the following pages for performing your pet health exams, and for daily assessment while treating your pet at home.

# At-home Pet Health Exam Worksheet

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

## **Pet History**

---

**Attitude:** Alert Depressed Comatose

**Lifestyle:** \_\_\_\_\_% Indoors \_\_\_\_\_% Outdoors

**Appetite:** Change Increased Decreased Vomiting

**Ears/Nose/Throat:** Normal Coughing Sneezing  
Irritation/Redness/Scratching: \_\_\_\_\_ Discharge: \_\_\_\_\_

**Stools:** Normal Diarrhea Constipation Color: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mucus Blood: Incr. Freq. Decr. Freq.

**Urine:** *Volume:* Normal / Increased / Decreased  
*Frequency:* Normal / Increased / Decreased  
Color: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity/Mobility/Joints:** *Activity:* Normal / Increased / Decreased  
*Mobility:* Normal / Increased / Decreased  
Pain Swelling

**Water Consumption:** No Change Increased Decreased

**Dermatologic:** Normal Irritation/Redness/Scratching Hair loss  
Laceration Erosion/Ulcer Mass/Growth/Lump Other





