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EARLY DISEASE DETECTION TESTING IN YOUR SENIOR CAT

What is early disease detection testing?

Early disease detection testing is the term given to a group of tests that is performed specifically to detect signs of early disease in a pet that appears healthy.

Why do early disease detection testing?

Pets cannot tell you how they are feeling and as a result disease may be present before you are aware of it. If a disease or condition can be detected before a pet shows signs of illness, we can often take steps to manage or correct the problem before irreparable damage is done. Early disease detection testing is particularly important in the senior pet, since there is a greater chance that underlying disease may be present.

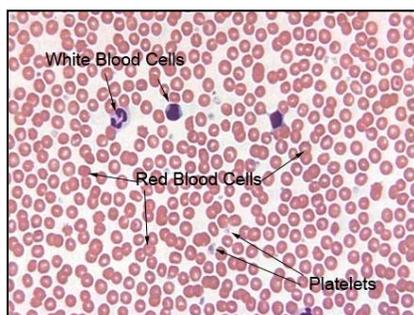


When is early disease detection testing done?

Early disease detection testing is usually done once yearly, and many pet owners combine early disease detection testing with their annual visit to the veterinarian for their cat's physical examination and vaccinations. Your veterinarian may recommend more frequent testing depending on your cat's age or specific health concerns. Monitoring your pet's health status on a regular basis makes it easier for the veterinarian to detect minor changes that signal the onset of disease.

What is involved in early disease detection testing?

There are four main categories of early disease detection testing for the senior cat: complete blood count (CBC), biochemistry profile, urinalysis, and thyroid hormone testing. Within each category, the veterinarian will determine how extensive the testing should be. In younger cats without noticeable health complaints, relatively simple testing may be adequate. However, in the geriatric cat, more comprehensive testing is recommended.



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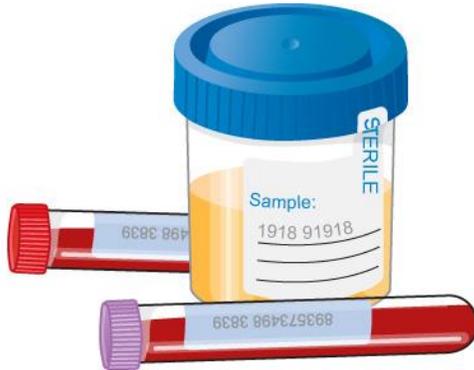
Complete Blood Count -

This simple blood test analyses the cellular components in the bloodstream. These include

red blood cells, which carry oxygen to the tissues, white blood cells, which fight infection and respond to inflammation, and platelets, which help the blood to clot. The CBC provides details about the number, size, and shape of the various cells types, and identifies the presence of any abnormal cells. (See handout *Complete Blood Count.*)

Biochemistry Profile -

This is a series of tests performed on serum which is a component of blood. These tests provide information about how well the various organs of the body are working, and help to detect the presence of some metabolic diseases. There are tests to assess the liver, kidneys, and pancreas, tests to identify the presence of diabetes, and so on. (See handout *Serum Biochemistry*). If minor abnormalities are found on the biochemistry profile, the veterinarian may simply request that you repeat the tests at a later time; depending on the abnormality, this may be in a few days, a few weeks, or a few months. In some cases, a more extensive diagnostic workup may be recommended, including an expanded biochemistry profile, or special tests and/or imaging (x-rays, ultrasound).



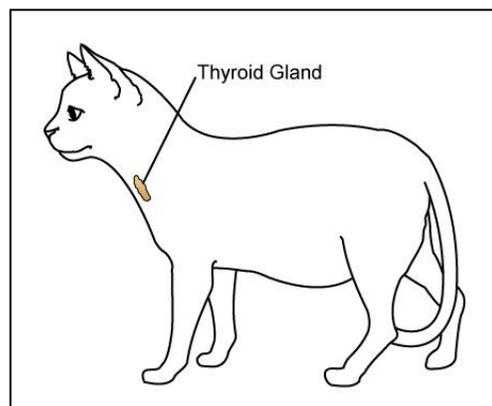
Urinalysis -

Urinalysis involves an analysis of the chemical components in urine, as well as a microscopic examination of the cells and solid material present in urine (See handout "*Urinalysis*"). Urinalysis provides information about how well the kidneys are working, identifies the presence of inflammation or infection, and may detect the presence of underlying metabolic disease such as diabetes. Urinalysis is necessary for a complete assessment of the urinary system. It should be performed routinely as part of wellness testing, and is particularly important in the geriatric cat because of the high rate of kidney disease in older cats.

Thyroid testing -

The thyroid gland is like a "thermostat", and it "sets" the metabolic rate of the whole body (See handout *Thyroid Testing*). Thyroid disease is common in the older geriatric cat, and cats that are more than eight years of age should be tested for thyroid function as part of routine wellness testing.

The most common thyroid disease in the cat is called *hyperthyroidism*, which develops when the thyroid gland produces excessive amounts of thyroid hormone. High levels of thyroid hormone cause a marked increase in the metabolic rate, which puts a strain on the heart and other organs. The typical signs of hyperthyroidism in the cat are unexplained weight loss, increased appetite, restlessness, increased thirst and urination, or vomiting and/or diarrhea.



Glaucoma Testing-

Glaucoma is defined as an increase in pressure within the eye. This is measured using an instrument called a *tonometer*. Glaucoma is caused by inadequate drainage of fluid, rather than the over production of fluid.

Blood Pressure Reading-

Routine testing of your pet's blood pressure can help to diagnose early signs of disease processes like heart and kidney disease.

Heart Disease Screening-

Heart disease in cats often goes undiagnosed until too late because it can be symptomless. Although there is no cure for heart disease, early detection can positively impact your cat's quality of life. A simple blood test is now available that can measure the presence of certain cardiac markers that indicate heart disease.

Summary

Early disease detection testing is a simple and effective way of monitoring your older cat's health. Early detection and correction of medical problems help to ensure that your pet will be healthy and active for as long as possible.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Kristiina Ruotsalo, DVM, DVSc, Dip ACVP & Margo S. Tant BSc, DVM, DVSc.
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