

4-H DOG PROJECT HEALTH SUPPLEMENT



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4-H Veterinary Science project members investigate the normal health of several animal species. It's important that you become familiar with the normal health of your project animal so that you can recognize when your pet isn't well.

This dog project health supplement should acquaint you with common health characteristics. Your ability to recognize the following characteristics will help you and your veterinarian work as a team to keep your dog in good health.

You should keep a record of any abnormalities which do occur. This record will be important as a case history when your veterinarian begins to formulate a diagnosis. You can create your own chart or use Wisconsin 4-H Publication No. 4H369A.

Your dog's **attitude** is a characteristic with which only you are familiar. An abrupt or gradual change in your pet's behavior may be an indication of sickness. Study your dog's eyes, facial expression, and body language. Tail wagging is an important mood indicator. A change in behavior must have a reason. Try to find the cause.

A dog's normal **stance** is well-balanced on four sturdy legs. The topline is normally level with the head held up proudly. Your dog may hang their head if they have been hurt or if they have done something wrong. Groveling at your feet is usually a sign of submission. This may be your dog's way of apologizing.

Some dogs prefer to sleep a lot. Others are extremely active. Some walk sluggishly. Others jump excitedly all over their owners and run until they collapse with exhaustion. All of these **movements** are normal for each individual. Know what **movement and gait** are normal for your dog's breed and age group. Limping is not normal. This is a characteristic you should be able to recognize.

Keep track of your dog's **weight**. Normal weight varies with breed, age, and pregnancy. Some dogs normally appear more "boney" such as an Afghan, while the pug is very filled out and heavily muscled. Be concerned with a sudden or gradual weight loss. This is a sign of several diseases or feeding problems. If your pet appears to be

ravenous, allow him to eat. However, if he seems to be gaining weight after he has reached full growth, cut back on his food supply. The normal dog **coat condition** is smooth and glossy, although, this too varies with breed and age. Many breeds' hair coats change drastically in appearance from puppy to adult. Some breeds shed, others do not. Don't mistake normal seasonal shedding for hair loss caused by external or internal parasites, nutritional deficiencies, or other fur diseases. Flea infestation, ringworm, and dermatitis are all abnormal conditions you must recognize early so that your veterinarian can prescribe treatment.

Skin and mucous membranes (color and condition) are important indicators. Normally a dog or puppy's skin is soft, loose, and pliable. Tight skin may be a sign of water loss or dehydration. Mucous membranes line all body openings such as the eye, ear, nose, mouth, rectum and vagina. These membranes should be pink and moist in a healthy dog. Keep an eye on these areas. If any should become dry or reddened, your pet may need medical attention.

An obvious characteristic to notice on your project animal is their **bodily discharges**. Feces should be well-formed and firm. Urine is watery-yellow. Abnormal feces may be runny or may contain blood or mucus. Diarrhea is a sign of many ailments. Blood-tainted urine is also abnormal. Twice each year female dogs will have a bloody vaginal discharge. This is one of their normal signs of heat. This sign may go unnoticed if your bitch runs loose outside. The extent of this condition also varies from one female to another. A dog which drags its rectum on the ground frequently may have plugged anal glands.

What about your dog's **voice**? Most dogs (except the Basengi) use their vocal cords very effectively. Your pet's bark readily makes you aware of unexpected visitors, or perhaps his desire to go outside. You have probably learned to distinguish one type of bark from another. And, you can probably recognize your dog's bark from that of all other dogs. Your dog's yelp, whimper or whine may also let you know when they aren't feeling well. It's important that you listen to your dog.

You're lucky to own a pet with such a wonderful ability to communicate with you!

A healthy dog has a good **appetite**, although some dogs like to eat too much. They don't regulate their food intake as well as some other animals do. Watch how much food your puppy or dog consumes in one sitting. Do they save some for later or gulp it all down rapidly? Know your pet's habits so you can recognize any abnormalities. Lack of appetite is a sign of illness or depression. You know you don't like to eat when you're not feeling well!

Unless your pet bites, their **teeth** may often go unnoticed. Aged dogs often have dental problems. Many veterinarians perform frequent dental checkups on canines. A puppy normally has 28 teeth. At six months a puppy normally loses and replaces these teeth with new ones bringing the final total to 42. You should recognize a tartar and calculi buildup or redness of gums. Your pet may need large dog bones and hard biscuits. Preventive dentistry is as important to your pet as it is to you.

What is your pet's normal **temperature, heart rate, pulse** and **respiration**? Normal temperatures for a dog range between 100.0° and 102.8° F. You can easily take your dog's temperature. Use a rectal thermometer. Shake it down. Lubricate it with vaseline. With your dog standing, hold up their tail with one hand and insert the thermometer about two inches into the rectum. Remove after about two minutes and read the temperature.

Watch your dog's rib cage rise and fall or place a mirror in front of his nose. Count the number of breaths in 15 seconds and multiply by four. Your dog is breathing properly if they take 12-20 breaths per minute. Normally your dog's heart will beat 100-140 times per minute. You can check this by placing your palm on the left side of the chest wall just behind the point of elbow to feel the beat. In larger breeds, with massive chest walls, you can check your dog's pulse by placing your palm inside their hind leg. By pressing lightly you can feel the blood pulsing through the femoral artery. This should be the same as the heart beat.

Practice recognizing and recording many of these common health characteristics on your dog everyday. When you need to contact your veterinarian, be prepared with a complete report of all the signs you have noticed.

If you'd like further information on animal health, join the 4-H Veterinary Science project. You may use your dog as a Veterinary Science project animal!

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