

## How to Implement Twice-A-Year Wellness Exams

By Wendy S. Myers



Imagine the possibilities of seeing pets twice a year for wellness exams. But will clients welcome the change? An AVMA study of 800 pet owners found that 66% would visit for twice-a-year exams if it could increase pets' lifespan and quality of life.

“Advances in veterinary medicine have led to an increased percentage of aging cats and dogs,” says Dr. Jack O. Walther, AVMA immediate past president. “Unlike people, cats and dogs can’t tell you where it hurts. An exam every six months enables early detection and treatment of potential medical conditions.”

Last October, the AVMA and Fort Dodge Animal Health launched National Pet Wellness Month to educate pet owners about pets' aging process and the importance of twice-a-year wellness exams for all adult pets. Consider these benefits:

- Prevention of disease or injury
- Enhanced quality of life and longevity
- Better compliance for wellness services, including vaccinations, heartworm and flea preventives, diets, dental cleanings, and diagnostics

Follow these steps to implement twice-a-year exams:



**Step 1: Schedule a doctors' meeting.** Discuss what topics your veterinarians will cover during each six-month exam, wellness diagnostics, and vaccination protocols. Before the doctors' meeting, ask your veterinarians to visit the National Pet Wellness Month website at [www.npwm.com](http://www.npwm.com).

Then discuss these questions:

- What are the benefits of seeing our patients twice a year for wellness exams?
- How will we adapt our vaccination protocols?
- What client education will we need to implement?
- How will our reminder system need to be updated?
- How will we involve staff?
- When do we plan to implement this program?

Next, list topics you'll cover during each six-month checkup. Consider these suggestions:

### Dogs and Cats Age 1 to 6

First wellness exam	Second wellness exam, 6 months later
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Comprehensive physical exam</li> <li>✓ Oral exam</li> <li>✓ Vaccines tailored to the pet's age, health and risk assessment</li> <li>✓ Fecal test to check for intestinal parasites (CDC recommends every 6 months.)</li> <li>✓ Heartworm test (dogs only)</li> <li>✓ Discuss home dental care</li> <li>✓ Annual wellness blood and urine baseline screen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Comprehensive physical exam</li> <li>✓ Oral exam</li> <li>✓ Vaccines tailored to the pet's age, health status, and risk assessment (<i>Bordetella</i>, which prevents kennel cough, may be given every 6 months to dogs.)</li> <li>✓ Fecal test to check for intestinal parasites (CDC recommends every 6 months.)</li> <li>✓ Discuss home dental care</li> <li>✓ Professional dental cleaning if needed</li> <li>✓ Discuss wellness screen <u>again</u> if declined during first visit</li> </ul>

**Step 2: Get staff involved.** Schedule a hospital-wide meeting to explain doctors' protocols. Develop talking points to ensure consistency when responding to clients' questions. Next, assign areas of implementation. Receptionists could hang posters, display brochures, and add a wellness message to invoice footers. Technicians could role-play client education. The practice manager could order supplies and update the reminder system.

**Step 3: Educate clients.** When clients arrive, give them a pet age analogy chart and wellness brochure. Ask them to identify their pets' age in human years and explain that the AVMA, which represents 70,000 veterinarians, supports twice-a-year wellness exams. Promote this message with posters, brochures, newsletters, footers on invoices, message on hold, website, and reminder cards.

To get started today, order a free wellness kit from [www.npwm.com](http://www.npwm.com).

### About the Author:



Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver. Her consulting firm helps teams improve compliance, client service and practice management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training to more than 2,600 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is a partner in Animal Hospital Specialty Center, a 13-doctor AAHA-accredited referral practice offering internal medicine, surgery, neurology, oncology, specialty dentistry, and emergency care in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She is the author of four books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' e-newsletter on our website at: [www.csvets.com](http://www.csvets.com). E-mail Wendy at: [wmyers@csvets.com](mailto:wmyers@csvets.com).