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Preventative Medicine: Fecal samples

Feces, commonly known as poop, can tell us a great deal about your pet's intestinal health. We can look at its form and color. We can also examine it at a microscopic level. Why is it so important to get a fecal sample examined every year? It is an important part of a wellness examination. We can look for evidence of intestinal bleeding, bacterial overgrowth, bacterial infections, and most importantly-any parasites your pet may have picked up during the year. Some parasites like tapeworms we can see. Most of them are microscopic and we'd never know that they were there if it weren't for microscopic examination. "But my pet doesn't have diarrhea." Dogs and cats can have parasites without having diarrhea. Should you be concerned? Absolutely. Several parasites can cause disease in people and pets. Giardia, a waterborne protozoan is a prime example. Your pet can pick it up from a walk outside and give it to you while licking you or by petting them and then putting your fingers in your mouth. Although most people get giardia from drinking contaminated water, the risk remains, especially to children. A very common parasite, the roundworm, can cause a lot of damage to young children if they ingest the larvae. All of these parasites are easily treatable with medication. "But my pet is strictly indoors, should they have a sample taken?" Yes. We look at feces for more than parasites. The feces can clue us in on a variety of disorders. Also, people can bring in parasites from the outside on their clothing, shoes, and even from themselves. How does my pet get a fecal sample tested? To be easy on your pet, bring a relatively fresh sample (from that day) in with you and give it to the exam room technician or the receptionist. It's okay if there is litter on it. You only need a piece the size of the end of your thumb. If the feces are abnormal, bring in the abnormal portions. Use a plastic bag or a container you don't care too much about to bring the sample in. Feces are yucky, but it's very important to have them examined annually.