

Signs of a healthy dog

How do you know that your dog is fit and healthy?

Is it because he has a cold moist nose, like some old canine folklore suggests?

Sadly, that's a fairy tale. It takes a little bit more to consider your dog's all round health. Here are a few things you should know.

1. Coat - The coat should be full, shiny and soft to the touch. Hair loss should be at the minimum. Coat shedding should be Spring and Autumn. Wire coats should be springy and full of life. There should be no thinning or lack of undercoat in double-coated breeds such as the Collie and German shepherd. (Check diet)
2. Skin - The skin should be smooth without areas of redness, open sores, scales, scabs or growths. Normal skin pigment can vary according to the breed and colour of the dog. Some will have pink, black, brown or even spotted areas to the skin. The dog should be free of fleas, ticks and other external parasites. (Check diet)
3. Eyes - Healthy dogs have bright, shiny eyes. The area around the eyeball is known as the conjunctiva and should appear a healthy pink. Paleness in this area could be a sign of several underlying problems. There should be no thick, green or yellow discharge from the eyes. Certain breeds such as Poodles or Bichons tend to have a "watery" discharge that can often be considered normal.
4. Ears - Ears should be clean with no dark or bloody discharge or matter in the canal. Nor should there be a foul odour or redness and swelling around the ear.
5. Mouth - Gums should be pink or pigmented with black. Pale gums can be a sign of anaemia. Red, inflamed gums are often a sign of gingivitis or other periodontal disease. The dog should have no bleeding or foul breath. (Check diet)
6. Teeth - Young dogs will have sparkling white teeth while older dogs will have some darkening. This darkening should not include any hard white, yellow, green or brown matter. The teeth should also fit into the gum with none of the root showing. (Check diet)
7. Nose - It is true that a dog's nose is normally moist and cold to the touch. Moistness should come only from clear, watery secretions. Any yellow, green or foul smelling discharge is abnormal. Such discharge often signals canine distemper in younger dogs.
8. Temperature - A dog's normal temperature is 101 degrees F. Excited dogs or recently active dogs may run a slightly higher temperature. But drastic increases of over 103 degrees or decreases registering less than 100 degrees should be checked out. There is one exception. Dogs about to give birth will often have a temperature that drops to 99 degrees. This can occur as far as twenty-four hours before the actual birth begins.
9. Urine - Urine should be clear and yellow. Dark brownish or reddish urine usually indicates the presence of blood. A dog should also urinate in proportion to the amount of water taken in. Drastic increases or decreases can signal such things as kidney failure, stones, crystals or even diabetes.
10. Faeces - A dog's faeces should be firm and brown. This colour can be affected by the brand of dog food you use. Those that use a high amount of red food colour will have stools that are almost brick colour. There should be no worms, "grains of rice," red blood or black colour in the stool. An owner also needs to be aware of any diarrhoea, constipation, or lack of faecal production. (Check diet)
11. Muscles - An owner should be able to feel the indentations of the muscles. There should be no odd lumps in the tissue. (Check diet)

12. Weight - A dog that appears healthy in every way may still be over or underweight. The rib, back and hipbones should not show but be able to be palpated or felt. Dogs may have weight problems due to inadequate or over abundance of diet, diabetes, thyroid and various other problems. (Check diet)

The activity level of your dog is also an important factor in assessing your dog's health condition. If you find that the activity drops quite considerably, make sure that you check this list out, especially checking of the gums for paleness and of course you need to be able to check your dogs temperature.

These are just a few guidelines that you can look for in your pet. A qualified veterinarian is the best source of information concerning your dog's health and will often offer tips that are geared specifically towards your dog's breed and age.

If in doubt please telephone your Vet for further guidance.

Check diet = You are what you eat!