

Why Are Fecal Exams Important?

So you're on the phone scheduling your furbaby's wellness visit at the vet, and the receptionist asks you for a homework assignment: bring in a poop sample from your pet to your wellness appointment. So now what?

Fecal exams are important because it's the best way to screen for **intestinal parasites** that can cause anemia, weight loss, bloating, intestinal blockage, and even death in affected animals. There are some parasites that you or your children can get as well.

Kittens and puppies often contract intestinal parasites from their mothers while they're nursing, and adult pets can get several types of parasites through contact with other animals and contaminated soil and water. Usually, animals that get intestinal parasites contract them by accidentally consuming microscopic eggs or larvae, which then hatch and take up residence in the intestinal tract. Indoor animals can get them from flies, house plants, and debris brought in on your shoe (just to name a few).

What Parasites Do Fecal Exams Screen For?

Here are a few of the parasites that fecal exams screen for:

- **Hookworms:** These microscopic worms feed on blood by attaching to the intestinal wall.
- **Roundworms:** Also called nematodes, roundworms are parasites that can cause anemia, vomiting, intestinal damage, and weight loss, but many times infected animals show no symptoms. Nearly all dogs and cats become infected with roundworms at some point during their lives.
- **Whipworms:** Whipworms are a significant threat to pets who contract them. This parasite can cause anemia, weight loss, and even death.
- **Giardia:** This parasite can infect dogs, cats, and humans, and can cause vomiting, diarrhea, gas, and other problems. However, not all animals with giardia have symptoms.
- **Coccidia:** There are **6 species of coccidia-type parasites** that infect dogs and cats. Coccidiosis can cause diarrhea, weight loss, and (in extreme cases) hemorrhaging and death.

Parasites in the gut can affect your pet's health and quality of life, even if you have **indoor pets**. Fecal screening is important because intestinal parasites are microscopic and do not always cause obvious symptoms.

What's the Best Way to Collect and Store My Pet's Poop Sample?

Now that you're convinced (we hope!) that fecal screening is important, let's get down to the nitty-gritty: how to collect a sample. It's not a glamorous job, but there are a few ways to keep it simple and ensure that the vet has what he or she needs.

1. **Fresher is better.** If at all possible, collect the poop sample the day of the **wellness appointment**. Larvae and eggs of parasites become difficult to recognize the longer they are outside of your pet's body, so in order to make a correct diagnosis, the vet needs the freshest poop you can get.
2. **Bring enough poop.** It's not necessary to bring in a whole collection of different poops, but the vet will need at least 3-5 grams, which is less than 1 ounce, in order to determine what's going on in your pup or kitty's intestines. Size of a quarter.
3. **Select a good storage container.** When collecting a pet's fecal sample, it's important to use a bag or other container that's never been used for anything else. Don't use yesterday's sandwich bag or a pickle jar! The best bet is a fresh, sealable bag. If you need to store the sample overnight, you can put it in the fridge, but in that case it's a good idea to double-bag the sample so that you can avoid contaminating anything in your kitchen.

Fecal samples are just one of the tools we use daily to ensure your furbabies' health and wellness.

