

Clinical Exam of Your Dog

By conducting a clinical examination on your dog, you will be able to gather helpful information for your vet to enable them with their diagnosis.

The following steps break down how to assess and record some of your dog's **vital parameters**.

Before you start it is useful to have the following:

- An assistant if you have somebody in the household to help restrain your dog calmly
- A watch with a second hand or a stopwatch
- A room with good lighting
- A pen and paper to write down your findings
- If suitable, treats to reward your dog after the exam

Step 1

Observe your dog from a distance. This allows you to assess their overall demeanour. Are they happy and relaxed? Are they standing hunched up? Are they pacing around the room panting?

Step 2

Take your dog's respiration rate and pattern. Each full rise and fall of their chest can be counted as one breath. Count the number of breaths in fifteen seconds then multiply by four to get a rough idea of breaths per minute. Is the rise and fall of the chest smooth? Do the breaths appear shallow and rapid? Can you hear any noises that are associated with their breathing? If your dog is panting it is important to make a note of this.

Step 3

Take your dog's heart rate. This can be done from either their apex beat OR their femoral pulse.

The apex beat is located in the lower, front left area of their chest behind their left elbow. Lie your hand flat over the area until you establish a "lub-dub" beat. Each "lub-dub" is one heartbeat. Count these over fifteen seconds and multiply by four to get a rough heart rate in beats per minute.

The femoral pulse is located inside the left or right hind leg. Use your fingers to palpate the pulse above the stifle (knee) joint inside the leg. It can take a bit of practice. Each "pulse" felt is counted as one beat. Count the number of "pulses" felt over fifteen seconds and multiply by four to get a rough heart rate in beats per minute.

Step 4

Check your dogs gum colour. This is usually done using the inside of their upper lip in their mouth. Fold the gum up until you see the gums around the teeth and inside the lip. Normally these should be salmon pink in colour in a normal dog. Some dogs have black pigmentation to their gums so look for any pink patches that can be used. Make a note of the colour seen i.e. salmon pink, pale pink, white, yellow, purple, brick red – this is vital information for your vet.

Whilst you are looking at your dogs gums it is useful to take a capillary refill time. This can be done by simply applying gentle pressure to a pink part of the gum, the colour should go white and spring

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back to pink within 2 seconds. If it takes longer than this write the length of time it takes in seconds to return.