

Children's Resources: What is a Veterinary Technician?



Word of the Day:

Veterinary Technician

A credentialed veterinary technician, also called a vet tech, is a professional who assists veterinarians in exams and other procedures, records patient vital signs, runs lab tests, and provides general nursing care. The job of a vet tech is compared to that of a nurse in human medicine.

The major difference between a veterinarian and a vet tech is that only veterinarians can diagnose a patient, prescribe medicine, and perform surgery.

Discussion Question

- Why do you think the job of a vet tech is important?

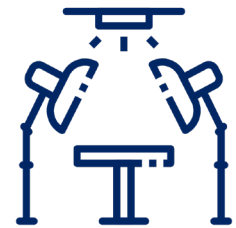
Part of a vet tech's job can include...



Taking X-Rays



Maintaining Medical
Equipment



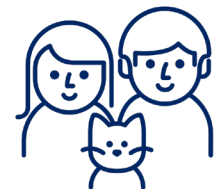
Prepping Patients
for Surgery



Monitoring Patients
Under Anesthesia



Participating in
Clinical Research



Educating Pet
Families

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Vital Signs

It is often the veterinary technician who will record your pet's vital signs during their visit. Vital signs include an animal's body temperature, pulse, respiratory rate, and blood pressure. These signs are then compared to their normal range. If a vital sign is abnormal (out of range), this may signal that something is wrong with the patient. Read below to learn more.

Body Temperature



Body temperature is measured in degrees. The normal body temperature for a cat or dog is around 100° F. A temperature at or higher than 102.5° F is considered a fever.

Pulse



A vet tech can feel for the pulse (heart rate) on the inside of the pet's hind legs. A normal pulse should be around 100-120 beats per minute.

Respiratory Rate



The respiratory rate is the breathing rate, or breaths per minute, and can be measured by observing the rise and fall of the pet's chest. A rate of above 40 breaths per minute is considered abnormal.

Blood Pressure



Blood pressure refers to the pressure inside the arteries (a type of blood vessel). It is measured using a cuff placed on the pet's limb or tail.

References:

[High Blood Pressure in Dogs](#). PetMD (2008)

Hohenhaus, Ann. [Everyday Medicine: What are Vital Signs?](#) Animal Medical Center (2016)

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Activities



3rd Grade & Up

Measuring Your Vital Signs

Materials: thermometer, stopwatch

- Being able to record vital signs is an important job for vet techs! While recording vital signs in pets should be left to veterinary professionals, your child can practice measuring vital signs on themselves or on a family member/friend.
- **Body Temperature** — body temperature can be measured using a digital thermometer.
- **Pulse** — demonstrating by using two fingers, show your child how to find their pulse on the inside of their wrist or neck. Using a stopwatch, set the timer for one minute and count the number of beats that occur. Alternatively, the timer can be set for 15 seconds and the number of beats can be multiplied by 4 to get the pulse/heart rate.
- **Respiratory Rate** — using a stopwatch, set the timer for one minute and count the number of breathes that occur.
- Blood pressure can only be measured using a special monitor and should be done by a medical professional.
- You can compare/contrast vital signs at rest and during physical activity. Have your child brainstorm what influences the change in vital signs.

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Activities



6th - 12th Grades

Career Exploration: Veterinary Technicians

Materials: computer/tablet/phone with internet access

- The field of veterinary medicine is huge and there are many job opportunities available to those interested in pursuing a career in the field.
- If your child is interested in a career in veterinary medicine, encourage them to research the various job opportunities and programs that exist, including those for credentialed veterinary technicians.
- Need a place to start? Check out the American Veterinary Medical Association's page on veterinary technicians by clicking the link below:
<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/careers/careers-veterinary-technician>