Understanding Your Pet’s Blood Work

Blood tests help veterinarians determine causes of illness accurately, safely, and quickly and let us monitor the progress of your pet’s medical treatments. To help you understand your pet’s test results, this guide explains common tests. A checkmark in any box indicates a significant abnormal finding on your pet’s blood work. If you have questions, ask any staff member. We want you to understand our recommendations and be a partner in your pet’s care.

**COMPLETE BLOOD COUNT (CBC)**
This is the most common blood test performed on pets and people. A CBC gives information on hydration status, anemia, infection, the blood’s clotting ability, and the ability of the immune system to respond. This test is essential for pets with fevers, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, pale gums, or loss of appetite. If your pet needs surgery, a CBC can potentially help detect some bleeding disorders or other unseen abnormalities.

- **HCT** (hematocrit) measures the percentage of red blood cells to detect anemia and hydration.
- **Hb** and **MCHC** (hemoglobin and mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration) help determine the blood’s ability to carry oxygen.
- **WBC** (white blood cell) count measures the body’s immune cells. Increases or decreases may indicate certain diseases or infections.
- **GRANS** and **L/M** (granulocytes and lymphocytes/monocytes) are specific types of WBCs.
- **EOS** (eosinophils) are a specific type of WBC that may indicate allergic or parasitic conditions.
- **PLT** (platelet) count measures cells that form blood clots.
- **RETICS** (reticulocytes) are immature red blood cells. High levels indicate regenerative anemia.
- **FIBR** (fibrinogen) is an important clotting factor and increased levels are often associated with inflammation. High levels also may indicate that a dog is 30 to 40 days pregnant.

**SERUM CHEMISTRY PROFILES**
These common blood serum tests evaluate organ function, electrolyte status, and more. They are important in evaluating older pets, pets with vomiting and diarrhea or toxin exposure, pets receiving long-term medications, and the pet’s health before anesthesia.

- **ALB** (albumin) is a serum protein that helps evaluate hydration, hemorrhage, and intestinal, liver, and kidney disease.
- **ALKP** (alkaline phosphatase) elevations may indicate liver damage, Cushing’s disease, and, in young animals, active bone growth. Elevations in SAP (serum alkaline phosphatase) in cats are generally more significant than those seen in dogs.
- **ALT** (alanine aminotransferase) is a sensitive indicator of active liver damage but doesn’t identify the cause.
- **AMYL** (amylase) elevations may indicate pancreatitis or kidney disease.
- **AST** (aspartate aminotransferase) increases may indicate liver, heart, or skeletal muscle damage.
- **BUN** (blood urea nitrogen) indicates kidney function. An increased BUN level is called azotemia and can be caused by kidney, liver, and heart disease, urethral obstruction, shock, and dehydration.
- **Ca** (calcium) deviations can indicate a variety of diseases. Tumors, hyperparathyroidism, kidney disease, and low albumin are just a few of the conditions that alter serum calcium.
- **CHOL** (cholesterol) is used to supplement diagnosis of hypothyroidism, liver disease, Cushing’s disease, and diabetes mellitus.
- **Cl** (chloride) is an electrolyte that is often lost with vomiting and Addison’s disease. Elevations often indicate dehydration.
- **CREA** (creatinine) reveals kidney function. This test helps distinguish between kidney and nonkidney causes of elevated BUN.
- **GGT** (gamma-glutamyl transferase) is an enzyme that indicates liver disease or corticosteroid excess.
- **GLOB** (globulin) is a blood protein that often increases with chronic inflammation and certain disease states.
- **GLU** (glucose) is a measurement of blood sugar. Elevated levels may indicate diabetes mellitus. Low levels can cause collapse, seizure, or coma.
- **K** (potassium) is an electrolyte lost with vomiting, diarrhea, or excessive urination. Increased levels may indicate kidney failure, Addison’s disease, dehydration, and urethral obstruction. High levels can lead to cardiac arrest.
- **LIP** (lipase), an enzyme, may indicate pancreatitis if levels are elevated.
- **Na** (sodium) is an electrolyte lost with vomiting, diarrhea, and kidney and Addison’s disease. This test helps indicate hydration status.
- **PHOS** (phosphorus) elevations are often associated with kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, and bleeding disorders.
- **TBIL** (total bilirubin) elevations may indicate liver or hemolytic disease. This test helps identify bile duct problems and certain types of anemia.
- **TP** (total protein) indicates hydration status and provides additional information about the liver, kidneys, and infectious diseases.
- **T4** (thyroxine) is a thyroid hormone. Decreased levels often signal hypothyroidism in dogs, while high levels indicate hyperthyroidism in cats.

Source: Understanding Your Pet’s Blood Work, a pet-owner brochure published by IDEXX Laboratories’ Pet Health Network. idexx.com/phnlit