



ZOETIS DIAGNOSTICS

GetWell

Managing tough conversations with confidence

Helpful guidance on communication about sick pet testing

zoetis

How to begin a sick pet conversation

Addressing distressed clients

Providing the best possible care for a sick pet begins with the conversation you have with the client. Building trust and confidence is the first step toward agreeing on a testing and treatment plan.

Recommending diagnostic testing

You know the importance of diagnostic testing for sick pets, but do your clients?

It's important for clients to understand that a pet's symptoms could be due to any number of underlying causes. Start by explaining that diagnostic testing can narrow down the cause to help inform a confident diagnosis, to then proceed toward a treatment plan – and help sick pets feel better.

When is diagnostic testing needed?

Diagnostic testing is recommended when pets exhibit signs including, but not limited to:

- ✓ Changes in appetite or thirst
- ✓ Diarrhea or loose stools
- ✓ Urinary accidents in the house
- ✓ Pacing or inability to settle
- ✓ Excessive panting
- ✓ Increased whining or vocalization
- ✓ Unusual shaking
- ✓ Hiding or avoiding physical contact
- ✓ Increased lethargy or sleeping more than usual
- ✓ Changes in behavior



96%

of clients in the U.S.
agreed to diagnostic
recommendations when
offered for their sick pet.¹

Veterinarians can guide technicians in making basic recommendations, then expand on them to tailor diagnostic plans to each patient.



Countering objections to diagnostic testing

Barriers to acceptance

The primary reason clients don't pursue sick pet diagnostics is the lack of recommendation from their veterinarian or clinic.¹ Let's take a look at some objections that may arise once you've recommended diagnostics.



How to deliver difficult news

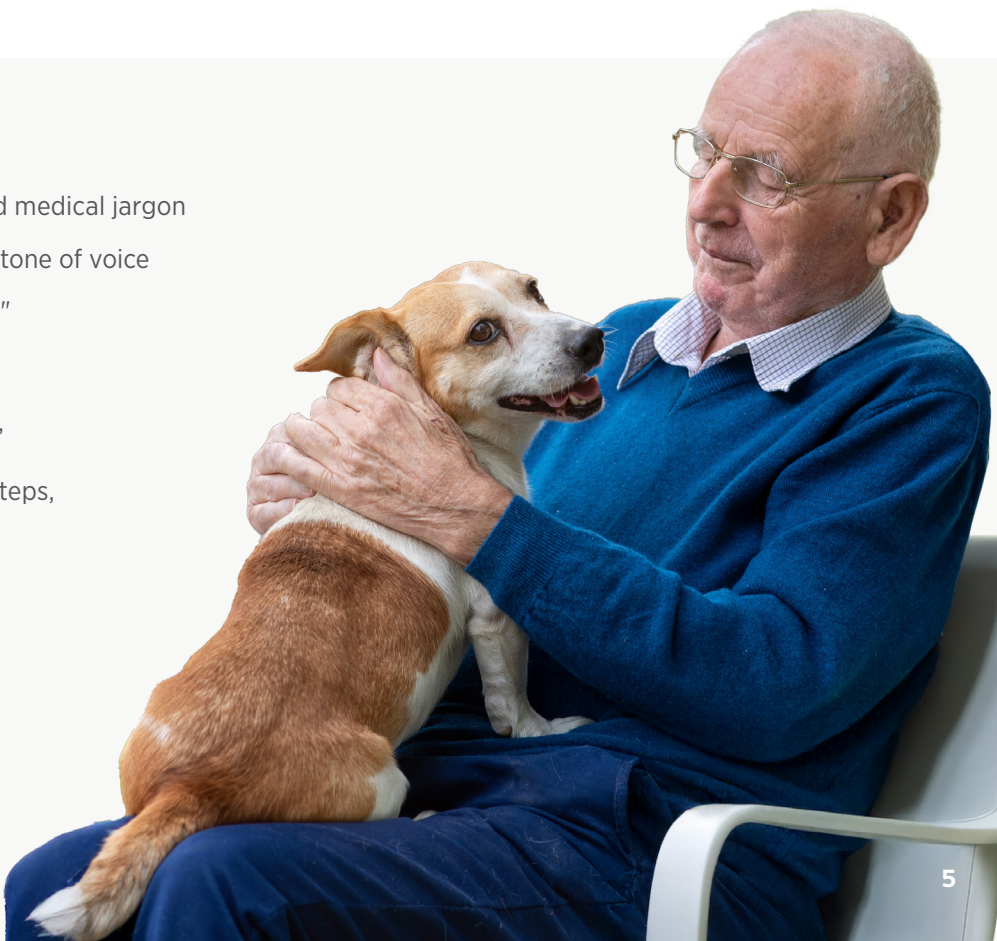
Unsurprisingly, receiving news about an underlying illness or diagnosis can be difficult to hear, and clients may be emotional. As their trusted care provider, you can deliver difficult news compassionately and effectively, providing support and giving them actionable next steps.

Consider following these steps when delivering news to clients:

- 1 Choose a private setting and sit at the same level as the client
- 2 Deliver the news clearly and directly, stating the facts
- 3 Allow time for the client to process the news and respond empathetically
- 4 Validate the client's feelings with statements like "I know this is upsetting" or "I can appreciate how difficult this is for you"
- 5 Discuss next steps and treatment options
- 6 Offer support and follow-up with a call

Additional Tips

- ✓ Use simple, specific language and avoid medical jargon
- ✓ Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice
- ✓ Avoid dismissive language like "at least" or "it could be worse"
- ✓ Use empathetic statements such as "I'm so sorry you're going through this"
- ✓ Provide information on potential next steps, even in worst-case scenarios



"The test seems unnecessary."

You may want to explain to your client that:

"Testing today can quickly pinpoint the cause of your pet's symptoms, potentially ruling out serious illnesses and easing your worries. By testing sooner, we can start treatment earlier, which may prevent the need for more invasive or expensive procedures down the line."

"It's stressful for my pet."

You can reassure clients that:

"We'll take every step to minimize your pet's stress during these procedures. You can help by bringing comfort items from home, such as favorite toys or blankets. For pets that are more reactive, we can consider pre-visit anxiety medications to make the experience smoother."

"The test is expensive."

Most clients strongly agree that sick pet testing is worth the money spent,¹ but here's an example of how you might address cost concerns:

"Our top priority is to identify what's troubling Buddy so we can begin the right treatment promptly. Addressing any underlying issues now can lead to a healthier, happier Buddy and potentially save you money in the future. One of our team members can provide a detailed estimate, and we offer flexible payment plans to make this process easier for you."

"I don't understand the benefits."

Don't be afraid of overexplaining — overall, clients said they would prefer more details and options than fewer. Try saying:

"Since your pet can't communicate when something's wrong, diagnostic testing is crucial. It can catch issues early, preventing them from becoming serious. This allows us to develop personalized treatment plans tailored to your pet's specific needs, ensuring they receive the most effective care possible."

A nurse or technician can provide much needed support and empathy when a veterinarian is out of the room.

Establishing a treatment plan

Build trust, improve understanding and ultimately provide better care for pets with a few key strategies.

Be as clear as possible

Explain why you're recommending specific procedures or treatments, and discuss cost estimates if needed:

- ✓ "I recommend 2 weeks of twice-daily antibiotics with food, a follow-up test after treatment, and monthly liver monitoring for 3 months. The total initial cost would be around \$160."
- ✗ "I'm recommending antibiotics. We might need to see Buddy back occasionally to check how things are going."

Provide more information

Explain the "why" behind each recommendation to increase compliance, and consider offering written materials or handouts for them to review at home:

- ✓ "It looks like Buddy has a low thyroid level. I am going to start him on a medication to help supplement his thyroid function. While he will need to remain on this medication long term, his condition should improve and stabilize quickly."
- ✗ "Buddy will need to remain on a thyroid supplement for the rest of his life."

Show empathy

Convey your concern by addressing the pet by name. Include the pet's specific medical history and relevant information:

- ✓ "Looking at Buddy's history, he was diagnosed with hip dysplasia as a puppy. This can result in arthritis as he ages. I'd like to make him more comfortable by adding an anti-inflammatory."
- ✗ "We have confirmed moderate hip dysplasia in both hips. Treatment will consist of an anti-inflammatory."

Follow up

Perform calls to check on the pet's progress and remind clients of any necessary follow-up care:

- ✓ "We're calling to follow up with you about how Buddy is feeling. Are you seeing any improvement in his symptoms? Our team is happy to help you book his next appointment."
- ✗ "We were expecting to see Buddy back by today, why haven't you brought him in?"

Be prepared to address concerns



Medications

Clearly address costs and medication directions, including timing and dosage.



Diets

Many conditions can benefit from specific pet foods. Address why and how they should change their typical diets.



Future procedures

Some pets may require ongoing treatments or surgeries, which can be burdensome.



Emergency care

Communicate why unexpected complications may arise and when they should bring their pet back in, or seek emergency care.

The importance of continued testing

Communicating the importance of continued monitoring for sick pets is crucial for their recovery and well-being. Effective communication can help increase compliance, improve outcomes and build stronger relationships with your clients.



Emphasize monitoring – ongoing testing

Ongoing monitoring allows for early detection of changes in a pet's condition. This can lead to more timely interventions, potentially improving the pet's prognosis and reducing the risk of serious health issues.



Provide specific instructions

Give clear, actionable instructions on what to monitor and how often. This may include observing behavior changes, assessing pain levels, or monitoring food and water intake. Concrete guidelines help clients feel more confident in their abilities.



Highlight the role of home care

Empower clients by explaining how their observations contribute to the overall treatment plan.



Explain the importance of trends

Emphasize that monitoring isn't just about individual readings but also about identifying trends over time. A series of measurements can reveal patterns that might not be apparent from a single check-up.



Share success stories

Use case studies or stories from your practice to illustrate the benefits of diagnostic testing and health monitoring. Personal stories can be particularly persuasive in demonstrating the value of ongoing health management.



Following up with your client

Ensure you have a system for following up with clients, including reminders for appointments and recommended monitoring.

Challenges clients may face

Caring for a sick pet can be emotionally taxing, often leading clients to express a range of feelings. Here are some common sentiments that sick pet clients might share:

Guilt and responsibility

Many clients feel guilty about their pet's condition, often second-guessing their decisions regarding treatment.

Being overwhelmed

Faced with various treatment options, clients may experience decision fatigue or have a hard time understanding complex details.

Isolation

Clients may feel isolated as they navigate their pet's illness.



Seeking support

Desire for understanding

Clients often seek empathy and support from others. They may express frustration when friends or family don't understand the depth of their bond to their pets or the challenges they face.

Need for information

Many clients feel overwhelmed by the need to constantly assess their pet's health.

Showing empathy can make all the difference for clients

Being mindful of the challenges facing clients as they navigate life with a sick pet will only help improve your communication skills and enhance their sense of connection and trust with your team.

Personalized best practices

Exam room – Technician/Assistant

Best practice:

“Hi there, I’m Sarah. I understand you’re here because you’re concerned about Buddy. Can you tell me a bit about what’s been going on? The more details you can share, the better we can understand what’s happening and create the best treatment plan for him.

(Client describes symptoms)

I understand how worried you must be. We’re going to do everything we can to help him. Do you have any immediate questions or concerns you’d like to discuss before the vet comes in?”

My personal script:

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Exam room – Veterinarian

Best practice:

“Good afternoon, Mr./Ms. [Client’s name]. I understand you’re here because Buddy hasn’t been feeling well. Can you tell me more about what you’ve noticed?

(Client describes symptoms)

Based on what you’ve told me and my initial examination, I think we should run some tests to get a better understanding of what’s going on with him. I’m recommending a few different tests to help us better understand the problem.”

My personal script:

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Recommending diagnostic tests

Best practice:

“These tests are essential diagnostic tools that will provide us with a comprehensive understanding of Buddy’s health. They will help us rule out or confirm any serious conditions and determine the best treatment plan. Our goal is to ensure nothing important is overlooked.

If you’re comfortable proceeding, we’ll set Buddy up to have blood and urine collected. Rest assured, we’ll take excellent care of Buddy, and I’ll be back to discuss the results with you as soon as they’re available.”

My personal script:

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Delivering difficult news

Best practice:

“I’m afraid I have some difficult news. The tests indicate that Buddy may have [diagnosis]. This means that he could be facing some serious health challenges. I know this is hard to hear. It’s completely normal to feel overwhelmed right now.

We do have options moving forward. We can discuss treatment plans that may help manage Buddy’s condition. It’s important to consider what will provide the best quality of life for him.

Regardless of the direction you choose to take, we’re here to help you and Buddy every step of the way. We can schedule follow-up appointments to monitor his condition and adjust our approach as needed. We care about Buddy and want what’s best for him.”

My personal script:

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Discussing a treatment plan

Best practice:

“I’m recommending that you give Buddy these antibiotics twice daily for ten days. They’ll help fight the infection. I’m also prescribing an anti-inflammatory to reduce his discomfort.

If you have trouble giving medications to Buddy by mouth, you can hide them in some wet food or treat pockets. Just make sure that he doesn’t eat around that pill! Additionally, I’d like you to limit his exercise for the next week, and make sure he has plenty of water. I’d like to see Buddy back in a week to see how he is responding to the treatment. Buddy should start to show improvement in a few days, but if he doesn’t, or his condition worsens, don’t hesitate to call us.”

I understand this might be a lot to take in. Here’s a written summary of the plan for you to refer to at home. How do you feel about moving forward with this treatment plan?”

My personal script:

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The importance of continued testing

Best practice:

“It’s essential to schedule follow-up examinations to assess how well the treatment is working. It will allow us to confirm that the infection has resolved and that there are no underlying issues left untreated.

Pets often hide their discomfort, making it hard for you to notice changes. By detecting health issues early, we can avoid more complex treatments down the line that could be both costly and stressful for you and Buddy.

I’d recommend bringing him back in a week to see how he’s doing, and we can discuss whether he needs further testing then.”

My personal script:

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Access additional resources at zoetisdiagnostics.com/us/getwell



Front office staff can help ensure treatment plan compliance by scheduling follow ups and calling to remind clients of appointments.

Best practice:

"Dr. [Name] would like to recheck your pet in 10 days to make sure things are improving. Do Tuesdays at 10am work best for you? It looks like I've got that time open with her now and would be happy to go ahead and schedule that for you."

References: 1. Data on file, Study No. TI-10877, 2024, Zoetis Inc.

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