

ANNUAL HEALTH TESTING FOR YOUR WHEATEN

Every dog needs an annual veterinary checkup. There are some diseases that are found more frequently in Wheatens than in other breeds. Since these conditions can lurk for years without showing any signs, during your Wheaten's annual checkup, certain blood and urine tests should be done. In many cases, ***early diagnosis and treatment can prolong your dog's quality of life.***

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What are These Diseases?

Please note that the links below are to articles that are general in nature on external websites. SCWTCA reminds readers they are not a substitute for the advice of their own veterinarians and/or a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (DACVIM).

- **Protein Losing Enteropathy – PLE:** PLE is characterized as a loss of protein from the intestines due to intestinal disease. There can be many causes of PLE, but it's important to note that there may be a hereditary component in Wheatens, predisposing them to inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and/or intestinal lymphangiectasia.
 - The average age of onset is 4½ years (range 0.5-11 years).
 - A PLE dog may exhibit diarrhea, vomiting, edema/ascites, picky appetite, and weight loss. Since these are symptoms of many types of illness, serious and minor, proper diagnosis is important. Left untreated, PLE can become serious and fatal.
 - Treatment is with medication and diet and can result in extended life.
 - Learn more about PLE here: [Protein Losing Enteropathy](#)
 - Learn more about IBD here: [Inflammatory Bowel Disease](#)
- **Protein Losing Nephropathy – PLN:** PLN is also known as glomerular disease. It causes significant protein loss through the glomerulus, a structure of the kidneys. While PLN can have several causes, it's important to note that Wheatens can have familial PLN due to a podocytopathy causing glomerulosclerosis. Note that PLN is **not** "old age" kidney disease and is different than Renal Dysplasia. PLN can be associated with systemic hypertension, thromboembolic events, edema/ascites, and eventually chronic renal failure.
 - The average age of onset is 6 years (range 2-11 years).
 - *Dogs will not usually exhibit symptoms until the disease is very advanced.*
 - Left untreated, PLN is usually fatal.
 - Treatment is with medication and diet. Early intervention can result in a longer life span.
 - Learn more about PLN here: [Protein Losing Nephropathy](#)
 - Some useful links for your veterinarian: [International Renal Interest Society \("IRIS"\) Consensus Clinical Practice Guidelines for Glomerular Disease in Dogs](#)
- **Renal Dysplasia – RD:** RD is the abnormal development of the kidney (also known as Juvenile Renal Disease). This malformation can result in early renal failure.
 - Average age of onset is under 1 year although it may not be detected until years later.

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- Puppies are often characterized as “poor doers; they are not good eaters, are depressed, do not thrive. Frequent drinking and urination can be seen.
- Treatment for chronic renal failure may help prolong quality of life.
- Learn more about kidney failure here: [Kidney Failure](#)
- **Addison’s Disease:** Addison’s Disease is also known as Hypoadrenocorticism. It is the insufficient production and secretion of certain endocrine hormones made by the adrenal gland cortex. Wheatens are predisposed to two types of Addison’s disease: typical and atypical.
 - Addison’s is referred to as “the great pretender” because the symptoms are typical of other illnesses...a dog may have GI upsets, listlessness. Addison’s can mimic signs and blood test changes that are seen in renal failure cases (but reversible with treatment).
 - Left untreated, a dog can go into an “Addisonian crisis” – a collapse, often after an exciting or stressful event. *Addisonian crises are life-threatening emergencies.*
 - Once suspected by your veterinarian based on a combination of symptoms and blood test abnormalities, a specific blood test (ACTH stimulation test) confirms Addison’s disease. Treatment with medication for life can result in a long, good quality life span.
 - Learn more about Addison’s here: [Addison's Disease \(Hypoadrenocorticism\)](#)

Annual Testing Protocols

Early warning changes of PLE, PLN, and RD may be noted on the annual laboratory screening test results, so don’t wait until your dog shows outward signs of illness.

In the absence of symptoms or other health problems, annual health testing is recommended starting at 1 year of age to pick up early warning changes before your dog shows outward signs of illness, and to get a baseline for future comparisons should your dog become ill.

These protocols are for **healthy companion dogs**. Please see below for breeding animals and those who have had the [Genetic Testing for the PLN-Associated Variant Alleles](#)

- Biochemical Profile aka Chem Screen (*include total protein, albumin, globulin, creatinine, blood urea nitrogen (“BUN”), SDMA, cholesterol, sodium, potassium, phosphorus, etc.*)
- Complete Blood Count (“CBC”)
- Urinalysis (*including specific gravity, dipstick, and urinary sediment*)
- Urine Protein/Creatinine Ratio (“UPC”) or a Microalbuminuria (“MA”) test

Protocols for Wheatens being bred:

SCWTCA members must follow the requirements of the [SCWTCA Code of Ethics](#).

Breeders who are concerned about PLE may want to consider doing annual fecal API testing in addition to annual blood and urine screening tests on healthy breeding dogs but should be aware there are situations in which the test can produce a false positive result. [Read more about the fecal API test here](#)

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Protocols for DNA tested Dogs

No matter the result of your dog's DNA test, testing at least annually is still important.

- *If your dog's results are Heterozygous* (i.e., having 1 copy of the variant alleles), in addition to regular annual blood and urine screening tests, beginning at age 2-4 years a UPC or MA might be checked every 6 months. If abnormalities are found, further testing is warranted.
- *If your dog's results are Homozygous Positive* (i.e., having 2 copies of the variant alleles), in addition to regular annual blood and urine screening tests, beginning at age 2 years, a UPC or MA is recommended **minimally** every 6 months. If abnormalities are found, further testing is warranted.
- *If you have not had DNA testing done*, it is recommended you follow the guidelines for a Homozygous Positive dog. For more information on DNA testing, [visit our DNA Testing page](#)

If Your Dog's Testing Shows Abnormalities...

Do not panic. There are multiple causes besides genetic diseases why there may be abnormalities. In many cases, one lab result or even one set of results is insufficient for a diagnosis. Your vet may wish to repeat testing in a few weeks to see what's going on and to do additional testing to rule out other causes.

Treatment for PLE, RD and Addison's disease are often part of a veterinarian's standard practice. If you or your vet need additional resources concerning PLN or another kidney disease:

- Meryl Littman, VMD, DACVIM, Professor Emerita of Medicine (Clinician-Educator), University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, who led the research into PLN in Wheatens for decades, created "[Recommendations Concerning Protein-Losing Nephropathy \(PLN\) in Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers](#)" which you should give to your veterinarian.
- The International Renal Interest Society (IRIS) <http://www.iris-kidney.com> has published consensus guidelines on the treatment of renal disease.

If your veterinarian is unable to manage your dog's care, seek the assistance of a veterinarian who is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (DACVIM). You can use this [Find a Specialist tool](#) to locate one near you...be sure to select "SAIM" which is a specialist in Small Animal Internal Medicine.

Dr. Littman has retired from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine but is available for paid consultations. Please contact her at merylitt@vet.upenn.edu

Shelly Vaden, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, Professor Internal Medicine, North Carolina State University is available for consultation ONLY with veterinarians. If you wish a consultation, please have your vet contact her at slvaden@ncsu.edu