

THE THREE MINUTE PHYSICAL FOR SHEEP

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Veterinarians have difficulty diagnosing conditions they have not thought of at the time of the physical exam. Just as with other species, following a routine will help to avoid serious oversights.

Approach with a container for urine collection out and available, as small ruminants often urinate when they sense approaching danger and the possible need to run for safety. Check for color (copper poisoning) and ketones (pregnancy toxemia). Sheep can be made to urinate by holding off the nostrils for 30 to 45 seconds (if the bladder isn't empty!).

Although a temperature is routinely taken (102°F), remember that chasing the animal or transporting it to your clinic in a compact car will likely elevate the temperature above the 104°F that is considered high normal for small ruminants.

Palpate the loin area for body condition score, judged on a 1 = emaciated to 5 = obese scale. If possible compare with others on the same diet to judge if poor body condition represents an individual or herd problem.

Check the incisors to estimate age and palpate the molars through the cheeks for gross irregularities.

Inspect the eyes for pinkeye and entropion. Inspect the conjunctiva of the lower lid of the eyes for evidence of anemia (haemonchosis, severe coccidiosis) and the sclera for icterus (copper toxicity).

Determine if the animal is visual (polioencephalomalacia) and if it can blink (otitis media, listeriosis).

Check the lips for soremouth and the external lymph nodes for caseous lymphadenitis or lymphosarcoma.

Listen to the lungs, especially on the right side, but remember that small ruminant lungs normally sound harsh. Slight nasal discharge is normal, as is a cough or two if you are strangling the animal.

Succuss the left side of the abdomen (grain overload) and try to ballotte a fetus on the right if the patient is female. If male, examine the urethral process for calculi.

Check the feet for footrot by inserting a finger between the toes from behind, looking for underrunning of the sole and interdigital dermatitis. Footrot smells bad.

Palpate the scrotum or udder for abnormalities.

Part the wool in several places looking for biting lice (tan, broad head, moving around) or sucking lice or tick-like keds (both parasites have dark black bodies because they suck blood). These parasites will be close to the skin and the wool will be ragged because the sheep chews at them. Also check fleece for wool breaks or wool slip.

Take a fecal sample for possible parasite exam. Feces adherent to the wool (dags) is evidence of previous scours.

Healthy Animal Check List

Use a copy of this check list or a similar list to examine your animal regularly

Below are some possible signs of a sick animal. Hopefully, you can check “No” to all of them.	No	Yes
Is your animal’s appetite poor?		
Is your animal standing hunched up with a drooping tail? Is your animal isolating itself away from other animals?		
Does your animal seem weak or uninterested in seeing you or in what is going on around it?		
Do your animal’s eyes look dull or cloudy?		
Are your animal’s eyes or nose very runny?		
Is your animal pressing its head against walls or grinding its teeth as if in pain?		
Are your animal’s gums and insides of the eyelids very pale rather than pink or white? What is your animal’s FAMACHA score?		
Is your animal coughing or breathing hard without having just done hard exercise?		
Does your animal appear suddenly blind or have “twirly eyes”. Is your animal circling or constantly trembling?		
When you pinch the skin over your animal’s ribs, does the skin NOT snap back into place immediately (possibly dehydrated)?		
Is your animal’s coat rough, crusty or flaky or does it have any bald spots from rubbing? Does your animal have any lesions or scabs, especially around its mouth, legs, ears or belly?		
When you push the hair forward on your animal’s back and shine a flashlight on it, do you see any evidence of lice or fleas?		
Is your animal lame or stiff moving? Does it have any blisters between its toes or an extremely foul smell to its feet?		
Does your animal’s belly NOT have normal rumen sounds? Does your animal’s belly appear very bloated on the right side?		
Does your animal have any unusual lumps/swellings on its face, body or legs?		
If your animal is milking, does her milk taste bad? Is her udder sore or lumpy or very cold or hot? Does her milk have milk clots or blood in it?		
If your animal is a male, is he having trouble urinating or is he stretching his back out as if in pain?		
Is your animal unusually fat or skinny? What is her body condition score?		
What is your animal’s body temperature? Normal is usually 101.5 - 103.5°F		
What is your animal’s respiration rate? Normal is about 12-24 breaths per minute for an adult and sometimes more for a kid		
What is your animal’s heart rate? Normal adult is about 70 - 90 beats/minute		

Example Five Point Check

2-Body condition, weight gain (poor, good?) and hair coat (rough, shiny?)

1-FAMACHA Score

3-Dag score (diarrhea, firm?)

4-Bottle jaw (present or absent?)

5-Movement within herd (lags behind, energetic?)



