

4-H FISH PROJECT HEALTH SUPPLEMENT



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4-H Veterinary Science project members investigate the normal health of several animal species. It's important that you become familiar with the normal health of your project animals so that you can recognize when one of your animals isn't well.

This fish project health supplement should acquaint you with common fish health characteristics.

Think about your goldfish, tropical fish, or scavengers. You are important to them because it is your job to keep them well and to know when they need medical care.

Recognition of the following normal characteristics will help you and your veterinarian work as a team to keep your fish in good health.

You should keep a record of any abnormalities which do occur. This record will be important as a case history when your veterinarian begins to formulate a diagnosis. You can create your own chart or use Wisconsin 4-H Publication No. 4H369A.

Close observation and early recognition of problems is especially important to fish, as they tend to die more quickly when ill than other species. Fish owners often find their pets floating - underside up - before they even realize their pets weren't feeling well! Remember this important health fact: it is much easier to keep fish healthy than it is to cure them.

You are the person most familiar with your fish's normal **attitudes** and **behavior**. Does your fish hide behind plants? Healthy fish are active and keep their dorsal (back) fins erect. Folded fins suggest poor health. Fish constantly at the top of the aquarium indicate foul water and lack of oxygen. So take note of your fish's **movements** of individual fins and swimming habits about the fish bowl or aquarium.

Some sick fish may "shimmy." This wagging movement without changing position is usually the result of a chill affecting digestive organs.

Different species of fish have different **temperaments**. You should be aware of these when placing various species together in one tank.

Goldfish, for example, are peaceful. Rosy Barbs are peaceful, but also very active so they should not be kept with shy fish, such as, the Pearl Gourami. Tiger Barbs are fin nippers and shouldn't be kept with Angels.

Watch for changes in **behavior**. Never give your fish more food than they can clean up in 10 minutes. Your fish may prefer a varied diet, fed sparingly several times a day. The Swordtail does best on a variety of foods. The Peppered Catfish is a scavenger and will normally cleanup leftover food from the bottom. Another scavenger, the Sucker mouth, prefers to eat at night. The Silver Dollar fish will eat most plants except Java Fern. You see how important it is that you know your fish's normal eating habits to keep them in good health.

Healthy fish have **skin** covered with beautifully colored, often ornamental, **scales**. This decorative characteristic may be the reason you chose your particular fish. The condition of your fish's body coverings is important to their health. Observe bodies, fins, mouths, and abdomens closely and daily. Notice signs of disease early. "Ich" is a contagious disease which appears as small white specks on fins and body. These cause your fish to itch and become listless. The condition can be easily treated. A white, cottony growth near the mouth is caused by a fungus and can also be treated. If your fish becomes gray, is listless, and refuses to eat, it may have Gill Rot. Medication will help this situation; but if not caught early your fish may die of suffocation.

Other important normals to be aware of are whether your fish species is a **live bearer** or **egg layer**. You may need to provide special equipment for your fish's form of **reproduction**. Also take note, all fish are more prolific during warm weather.

Different species require different, but very specific, **temperature** ranges. Goldfish shouldn't be kept with warm water fish since they prefer a temperature of 68° F. Most popular tropical fish thrive in 75° F water and slightly acid water of pH

6.8. Carefully maintaining this temperature and pH is your most important job.

Fish also have normal bodily discharges. They can even become constipated.

Observing your fish may not be enough. Keep track of the entire **aquarium condition**. Only growing and healthy plants liberate oxygen. Your fish's home may need additional aeration. Watch for algae. This fine, green plant growth is caused by an excess of light. Algae should be removed and light reduced.

You can estimate your fish's **breathing rate** by observing and counting the gill openings and closings. An increase in your fish's normal count may indicate lack of oxygen in the water.

Practice recognizing and recording many of these common health characteristics on your fish every day. When you need to contact your veterinarian or consult a fish care guide, you will be prepared with a complete report of all the signs you have noticed.

If you'd like further information on animal health, join the 4-H Veterinary Science project. You may use your fish as a Veterinary Science project animal!

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