

# recognizing health issues

## *canine health*

Recognizing signs of health issues early can go a long way toward preventing a serious problem. When in doubt, call your veterinarian. They can help you determine if your dog needs veterinary attention.

### **Prevention:**

Regular vaccines are critical to your dog's ongoing health. Parvo, distemper, rabies and other contagious, often deadly diseases can all be prevented through vaccinations. You never know when or where you will encounter infected dogs or their waste. Therefore, your dog should always be protected. Exact types and frequency of vaccination will vary according to location and activity. Talk to your veterinarian to determine the best vaccination regimen for your dog.

### **Common ailments**

#### **Arthritis:**

Former injuries and heredity can cause your dog to develop arthritis. Dogs often get arthritis in their backs, hips, knees, shoulders and elbows. Symptoms include difficulty getting up, stiffness in the morning, limping and discomfort after exercise. There are many anti-inflammatory medications and supplements available to keep your dog comfortable. Consult your veterinarian for safe medications and dosage. Swimming and mild exercise also help. Keep your dog at an appropriate weight for their size and build.

#### **Cancer:**

If your dog develops any lumps or bumps, have the veterinarian take a look. They may be simple fatty cysts, which are common in senior dogs. However, dogs can get cancer at any age. Spaying or neutering helps to prevent the two most common cancers: testicular cancer and mammary cancer. Some cancers can be removed, while others require ongoing treatment.

#### **Dental and gum disease:**

Regular dental care is just as important for dogs as it is for humans. Gum disease can make it difficult for your dog to eat, lead to tooth loss and allow infection to enter their body and organs. To help



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prevent periodontal disease, provide chew toys that will massage their gums. Canine toothpastes and toothbrushes are available at Petco. Human toothpaste can be harmful to dogs and should never be used. To prevent dental disease, an annual cleaning by a veterinarian is often necessary.

#### **Ear infections:**

A dog that frequently shakes their head and scratches their ears may have an ear infection. Most ear infections are related to allergies. Ears get filled with dark brown, foul-smelling waxy debris. Floppy-eared breeds and dogs that swim a lot are more likely to get recurring infections. If untreated, an ear infection can become chronic. Constant head shaking can cause large hematomas in the earflaps which require surgery to remove. Regular cleaning and care can help prevent infections.

#### **Flea bite dermatitis:**

This condition is a common problem easily prevented with topical flea treatments or pills. Some dogs react violently to a flea bite, chewing on their skin. When secondary infections develop, antibiotics are needed. Fleas can also lead to tapeworms, so an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

#### **Heartworm:**

This deadly disease, carried and transmitted by mosquitoes, is easily preventable. Your veterinarian will test your dog for heartworm and then prescribe a monthly or daily pill for prevention. The heartworm test needs to be repeated annually or if your dog misses a month of their medication. Collie breeds, such as shetland sheepdogs, border collies, bearded collies, etc. should avoid products with Ivermectin. Heartworm preventive is sometimes combined with other medications which will also kill other types of worms (excluding tapeworms) and/or fleas and ticks. Consult with your veterinarian about the best heartworm preventive for your dog.

#### **Hip dysplasia:**

This is an inherited disease in which the hip bones don't properly fit into the hip sockets, causing arthritis and lameness to varying degrees. Some mildly affected dogs never show any symptoms. Others become crippled as early as one year of age. When buying a purebred puppy, check to make sure both parents have been checked for and cleared of dysplasia. Dysplasia is diagnosed by hip X-rays, but often cannot be diagnosed until the dog is two years old. Mixed breed dogs can be affected, too. Treatment depends on the dog's age and severity of the disease. Treatments range from painkillers as needed to various surgical procedures. Keeping your dog at an appropriate weight helps to minimize strain on damaged joints.

#### **Hot spots:**

Hot spots can appear as a raw rash that is irritated or puss-filled. This is probably an infection and your dog will need antibiotics from the veterinarian to clear it up. Your veterinarian will also want to determine what caused the infection. Flea bites, allergies and lack of grooming are frequent causes.

#### **Obesity:**

An obese dog cannot run and play comfortably and may develop many obesity-related health problems. Swimming, easy walks, short games and less food are all keys to help your dog maintain an ideal weight. Avoid table scraps and biscuits that can add up to hundreds of extra calories. Your dog may go on a hunger strike when you start a new regime, but after refusing a meal or two they'll dive right into that low-calorie kibble.

#### **Worms:**

Worms are easily treated with proper medication. Some puppies are born with worms, and adult dogs can easily pick them up from eating wild animals or from contact with an infected animal's feces. Worms can sometimes be seen in the dog's stool, but are often not visible. To prevent the spreading of worms to other animals, feces should always be picked up. All dogs and cats in your household should have a stool sample checked by their veterinarian on a yearly basis.

#### **Tapeworms:**

If you see small rice-like pieces around your dog's rectum, your dog has tapeworms. Tapeworms are caused by eating fleas and they respond to different treatment than other types of worms. Proper flea prevention can help prevent the onset of tapeworms.

#### **Check with your vet immediately if you notice:**

##### **Blood:**

If your dog coughs up blood or has blood in their stool, take them to the veterinarian immediately. This could be a symptom of a serious medical condition. Carefully look for other symptoms so the veterinarian will have a better idea of what is wrong. Bleeding may be the only visible sign that a pet was hit by a car. If this is a possibility, contact your veterinarian immediately.

##### **Bloat (gastric dilation volvulus):**

Bloat is a life-threatening distension of the stomach that most often occurs in large dogs. The dog's stomach becomes filled with air and fluid that cannot be expelled. If this is not corrected within a few hours, the dog may die. If your dog keeps getting up and moving around like they're uncomfortable,

retchers but is unable to vomit, looks extremely bloated or salivates, go to your veterinarian for care. An X-ray will allow the veterinarian to diagnose bloat. Surgery may be needed in order to save your dog's life.

### **Swelling:**

Test the swollen area to see if your dog is in pain and feel if their skin is hot. You might want to use a muzzle, since even the most well-behaved dogs may bite when they are in pain. If you suspect a broken bone, don't rotate the limb—use a splint for the ride to the veterinarian's office. Bee stings, snake bites or an infected wound can also cause swelling.

### **Open wound:**

If there is a lot of bleeding, don't attempt to clean the wound. Cover the area with a clean gauze or a washcloth and apply direct pressure. Add another cloth if the first gets soaked through. Transport your dog to the veterinarian immediately.

### **Seizures and tremors:**

A seizure can be caused by many things, including poison. If not poison, seizures could be a symptom of epilepsy, heat stroke or an internal organ problem. Your dog may also sit and quiver like they have the chills. Take your dog to the veterinarian right away if you suspect any symptoms of seizures or tremors. Diagnostic tests can help your veterinarian diagnose the problem and prescribe treatment.

### **General depression/refusing to eat:**

Know your dog and their normal behavior—they could have an intestinal blockage, an infection or other serious problem that shows no other symptoms. Contact your veterinarian if you notice any abnormal symptoms. Be ready to tell them how long these symptoms have been present. Many dogs are like people—they have an "off" day or two. If your dog is depressed or refuses to eat for more than 24 hours for no obvious reason, contact your veterinarian.

**Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please contact your veterinarian.**