

Dachshund Health Issues

Dachshunds are prone to certain health issues and problems. Learn how to prevent them and keep them under control.

Excerpts from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Dachshund

HEALTH CONCERNS IN Dachshunds

Generally speaking, most dogs are square creatures, about as high from the ground to the top of their shoulders as they are from the front of their chests to their rumps. Each of their four legs is placed directly under the trunk of the body at the four corners. Their necks are gently arched and their heads balance out their body size: little heads for little dogs, big heads for big dogs. Dachshunds, however, are different. Their long, low-to-the-ground body type resembles a train with an engine in the front, a caboose at the end and the cars in the middle. Their long, swaying tails even add to their length, to accentuate how very different they are!

Because of their unique skeletal structure, Dachshunds have the potential to experience both environmental and genetic problems common to long-bodied dogs. Living in an environment that is oblivious to their special conformation, Dachshunds often are subjected to many hazards. Jumping, excessive stair-climbing and other high-impact activities usually result in serious diseases and conditions of the vertebrae. When genetically inferior dogs are bred, they often produce genetically inferior puppies. These puppies, in turn, grow up to develop serious skeletal conditions that are difficult and/or impossible to correct. In addition, overweight puppies are always at risk. There are many health conditions seen in dogs of many breeds, including Dachshunds. Let's review some of the major ones here.

MAJOR PROBLEMS

Intervertebral disk disease affects more Dachshunds than all other dogs combined, so naturally it is atop this list of conditions that concern Dachshund owners. Due to the Dachshund's long-backed construction, owners are advised to avoid activities that will strain their backs and spines. IVD, as the disease is known, is marked by herniated disks in the lower back. The disease primarily affects dogs with stunted legs. Affected dogs experience severe pain, usually in the lower back but sometimes in the neck as well. The disease can be treated medically and/or surgically, depending on the severity. Carts for dogs have been devised to assist Dachshunds with rear-quarter paralysis due to severe IVD.

Acanthosis nigricans, unfortunately, seems to be unique to the Dachshund. It is characterized by dark, thick skin in Dachshund's groin and armpits. While the genetic origin of the disease is unclear, it is certain that affected dogs are not to be bred. Vitamin E supplementation has been used to improve the condition, though no cure is known.

Hypothyroidism, commonly confused with obesity in Dachshunds, is simply the insufficient production of thyroid hormones. In Dachshunds, lymphocytic thyroiditis is most common. Dogs are affected between ages one to three years. Less than half of the Dachshunds affected manifest obesity; most individuals experience recurrent infections and lack of energy. Diagnosis of hypothyroidism is often tricky, though the treatment tends to be direct and affordable. Epilepsy is a seizure disorder that affects Dachshunds as well as many other breeds of dog.

Epileptic dogs can be managed with various veterinary drugs, though some side effects exist, including temporary weakness and increased appetite and thirst.

EYE PROBLEMS

A cataract is a cloudiness or film over the lens of the eye, categorized by age of onset, location on the eye and stage of the cloudiness. As it is a hereditary condition, parents should be tested before breeding takes place to ensure that parents are not carrying the genes for cataracts.

Glaucoma, a leading cause of blindness in dogs, is caused by an increase in fluid pressure within the eye. This disease can be hereditary, so parents should be tested prior to breeding. Treatment for glaucoma can be medical or surgical, or both.

Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA), a series of inherited disorders affecting the retina of the eyes, causes visual impairment that is slow but progressive. Night blindness can be the first sign of trouble. There is no known way to stop onset.

Other eye conditions have also been known to occur in Dachshunds. This list is by no means complete, but is included here to make new owners aware of possible problems in the breed: corneal dystrophy, congenital night blindness, entropion, tear duct anomalies, wall eye, keratoconjunctivitis, microphthalmia and ectasia syndrome.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS SEEN IN DACHSHUNDS

Discuss the following conditions with your veterinarian and/or your breeder. A better understanding of each of these problems will enlighten the new owner, making him more aware of the breed's congenital, hereditary and environmentally triggered problems. These potential problems include excessive hardening of the long bones, osteoporosis, cutaneous asthenia (also known as Ehlers- Danlos syndrome), renal hypoplasia (problem of the kidneys), diabetes, urinary tract problems and achondroplasia (a genetic bone disease). Hair changes, sluggishness and secondary infections are common and must be treated aggressively by a veterinarian. These symptoms are linked to a potential problem. Owners should be aware that deafness in dappled dogs and von Willebrand's disease (a common blood disease) are genetic.

It's important to note here that not all Dachshunds will suffer serious physical diseases or problems. However, it is important for the puppy buyer to be aware of the health conditions that can affect the dog he is about to purchase. Healthy parents and a well-informed, caring breeder are the best factors in producing healthy puppies. Many health problems in dogs today can be tested for in very young puppies. Reputable breeders usually have these tests performed so that they can send their puppies off to new homes with certificates of good health. Thus, the new owners can begin raising their puppy in the knowledge that they have chosen a healthy puppy from a quality source. In short, it all boils down to the old saying that knowledge is power—with humans and with dogs.

Dachshund Dog Characteristics

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