

Maltese Health Issues

Maltese dogs are prone to certain health issues and problems. Learn how to prevent and treat these problems.

Excerpts from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Maltese

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

In general, the Maltese is a healthy, hardy little dog, but as in so many other breeds, certain health problems can arise. However, if owners are aware of the problems that can occur, they are undoubtedly in a position to deal with them in the best manner possible. Some problems are genetic and are carried via heredity, but others are not.

Obviously, in many cases, veterinary consultation and treatment are necessary, but many Maltese owners feel that this breed responds well to herbal and homeopathic remedies, so these are well worthy of consideration. An increasing number of vets now incorporate some homeopathy and other natural healing practices with their traditional methods of treating animal patients, though you may have a harder time finding such a vet.

LICKING

Sometimes even a minor irritation will cause a dog to lick at his own skin, and this can all too easily develop into a habit. In the Maltese, such licking is likely to make the white coat turn pink in color, so owners really do need to prevent this. Several good preparations are now available to dissuade a dog from licking; usually they taste rather bitter and the habit can frequently be stopped by use of such an agent.

LEG PROBLEMS

Many toy dogs and other small breeds suffer from trouble with the knee joints, known as luxating patella, though of course only a few individuals are thus affected. Responsible breeders have their breeding stock checked regularly by their vets in an endeavor to reduce the incidence. Another important factor is that a dog should not be overweight, as this is likely to make the problem worse. Many dogs with luxating patella live with this problem without experiencing pain, but surgery sometimes has to be undertaken and is often successful.

BLADDER STONES

Although found only infrequently, bladder stones can sometimes cause a problem, as they are found more often in small breeds than in larger ones. Symptoms include frequent passing of urine, blood in the urine, straining to pass water, general weakness, depression and loss of appetite.

Urgent veterinary attention is necessary, for stones in the bladder can lead to irreparable kidney damage and life can be lost as a result. In many cases, stones can be dissolved by special diet under veterinary supervision, but certain types require surgical removal.

TEETH

As with many of the other smaller breeds, some Maltese lose their teeth at a relatively early age. It is therefore important to pay close attention to the care of teeth and gums so that they remain as healthy as possible, thereby preventing decay, infection and resultant loss.

Infection in the gums may not just stop there. The bacteria from this infection is carried through the bloodstream, the result of which can be disease of liver, kidney, heart and joints. This is all the more reason to realize that efficient dental care is of utmost importance throughout a dog's life. In addition to brushing and providing safe dental devices (nylon bones and the like), owners should bring their Maltese to their vets for dental checkups and thorough cleaning procedures.

BAD BREATH

Offensive breath is usually the result of problems with teeth and gums, but it can also be caused by indigestion or be related to the kidneys.

In cases of digestive problems giving rise to bad breath, charcoal, either in the form of tablets or granules, can often help. A useful aid to masking bad breath is the use of chlorophyll tablets.

EYE PROBLEMS

Because the Maltese is a coated breed, hair can cause irritation to the eyeball. This can result in conjunctivitis and is very likely to cause an excess of tear production. This, in consequence, causes tear staining below the eye, something often

noticed on white and light-colored dogs. Clearly, attention is therefore necessary to keep the eyes clean and this should be a routine aspect of grooming this breed.

Eye ulcers are also not unusual in small dogs and, at any sign of these, veterinary help should be sought quickly to prevent long-term damage. Often they are caused by something as simple as a bump or maybe a scratch. Veterinary prescription of suitable eye ointment or eye drops usually clears up the problem quite quickly.

EAR PROBLEMS

Helped by the fact that the Maltese is such a light-colored dog, it should be easy to detect ear problems at the earliest opportunity. Signs of an infected ear include a brown, odorous discharge that leads to the ear becoming red, inflamed and sore. At this stage, the dog will scratch at the ear and may hold his head on one side because of the pain.

It is important that ears are kept clean at all times, but if infection does arise, a vet will usually be able to prescribe suitable drops for efficient treatment.

GRASS SEEDS

Because they are low to the ground and have long coats and long ears, Maltese occasionally pick up grass seeds, the barbed ends of which can penetrate right into the skin. Often they are picked up on the coat, but work their way down to the skin, where they cause pain and sometimes abscesses. They can even get stuck inside the nostrils or between the pads of the feet. It is therefore always important to check the coat after a walk, particularly in late summer and autumn. At any sign of distress, the cause must be investigated immediately.

OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS

It must be understood that there are many other health problems that can be suffered by dogs, but it is not possible to outline them all here. As you get to know your Maltese, you will also come to recognize if ever he is "off-color," at which time a quick trip to the vet can often help to "nip a problem in the bud" so that suitable care and any necessary medication may be given.

Maltese Characteristics

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