

Laryngeal Paralysis Can Cause Panting in Dogs

Cushings disease is another possibility.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. My 3-year-old Labrador Retriever constantly pants. I realize this is how dogs sweat, but he does it all the time, except when he's sleeping. He's not overweight and the weather isn't hot now, but he still pants. His brother is more active, but doesn't have this problem. I've tried cooling beds, giving him doggie ice cream -- anything to cool him down, but nothing seems to help. Do you have any ideas on what might be causing this?

A. Panting can be a sign of laryngeal paralysis, but usually there is loud breathing associated with it, along with a tendency to overheat in warm weather and exercise intolerance.

Labrador Retrievers are well-known for getting partial or complete laryngeal paralysis. This occurs when the nerve that controls the opening to the airway is inflamed or damaged by the dogs own immune system, and he cannot fully open the folds of tissue that control airflow into the trachea.

If your dog has noisy breathing, also known as stridor, or seems to be unable to exercise like his brother, ask your veterinarian about doing a laryngeal exam. Your dog will have to be sedated for this procedure.

If your dog has laryngeal paralysis, a surgical procedure can correct it by permanently opening the laryngeal folds. Another cause of panting can be high levels of cortisol hormone in the bloodstream, caused by an overactive adrenal gland. When levels of cortisol get too high, your dog will drink more water, urinate more often, and pant. You might also notice some thinning of the coat and a distended belly. This is known as Cushing's disease, and can be diagnosed with a blood test.

Finally, some dogs pant for absolutely no medical reason at all, possibly because they enjoy it or it drives their owners crazy. Once your veterinarian has ruled out the other causes of panting, I would not worry any further and accept it as part of the unique personality of your dog.

Good luck with your Lab, Jon Geller, DVM

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