

# Your Cocker Spaniel

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



## Cocker Spaniels: What a Unique Breed!

Your dog is special! She's your best friend and companion and a source of unconditional love. Chances are that you chose her because you like cocker spaniels, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Outgoing and friendly personality
- Mild-mannered and easy to get along with
- Energetic, active, and athletic
- Well suited as a companion, family dog, or working dog
- Obedient and devoted
- Good with children

No dog is perfect, though, and you may have noticed these characteristics, too:

- Needs to be brushed regularly to keep coat mat-free
- Has a tendency toward shyness and fear-based aggression if not socialized properly
- Can be difficult to housetrain
- Needs daily exercise
- Prone to separation anxiety and associated barking and chewing behaviors

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's got her own personality, and you love her for it.

## Your Cocker Spaniel's Health

We know that because you care so much about your dog, you want to take good care of him. That's why we'll tell you about the health concerns we'll be discussing with you over the life of your cocker.



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Many diseases and health conditions are genetic, meaning they're related to your pet's breed. That doesn't mean your dog will have these problems; it just means that he's more at risk than other dogs. We'll describe the most common issues for cocker spaniels to give you an idea of what may come up. Of course we can't cover every possibility here, so always check with us if you notice any unusual signs or symptoms.

This guide, and the health evaluation schedule it contains, helps us and you plan for your pet's health-care needs. At the end of the booklet, we've included a description of what you can do at home to keep your cocker looking and feeling his best. You'll know what to watch for, and we'll all feel better knowing that we're taking the best possible care of your pal.

### *Allergies*

Cocker spaniels can get "hay fever" just like humans, which is an allergy to pollen, mold, mildew, or dust (called atopy). Your dog will get itchy: usually in the face, feet, and ears, though some dogs are itchy all over. Symptoms typically start between the ages of two and five and tend to get worse every year. The good news is that there are many treatment options available for this condition. An allergy to food is an inherited problem in cockers that can start at any age but is most common in young adult dogs. Symptoms can include itchy skin, recurrent ear infections, and chronic vomiting or diarrhea. A special diet is often the best way to diagnose and treat food allergy.

### *Back Problems*

Invertebral disc disease (IVDD) is a common condition in cocker spaniels. The disease is caused when the jelly-like cushion between one or more vertebrae slips or ruptures, causing the disc to press on the spinal cord. If your dog is suddenly unable or unwilling to jump up or go up stairs, is reluctant to move around, has a hunched back, cries out, or refuses to eat or go potty, she is likely in severe pain. Call

us or an emergency clinic immediately!

### *Bleeding Disorders*

Cockers are prone to some relatively rare genetically linked diseases of the blood. They occur when the immune system goes haywire and starts attacking the pet's own red blood cells or platelets. Your dog may act weak and lethargic and have gums that look whitish or yellow instead of the normal bright pink color. Other symptoms include bruises or abnormal bleeding. We'll perform diagnostic testing for blood clotting time to check for these problems before we perform surgery. We may prescribe steroids or other immune-suppressive drugs, and sometimes we must give emergency blood transfusions. Recovery takes weeks to months.

### *Cancer*

Cancer is the most common cause of death of dogs in their golden years, and your cocker spaniel is especially prone to lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes) and melanoma (cancer of the skin). Half of all cancers are cured by surgically removing them, and some types are treatable with chemotherapy. Early detection is critical! We'll do periodic blood tests and look for lumps and bumps when we examine your pet. If your cocker is overweight, we'll discuss exercise and diet because obesity is a risk factor for some types of cancer.

### *Dental Disease*

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. Unfortunately, cocker spaniels are much more likely to develop this problem than other breeds. It starts with tartar build-up on the teeth and progresses to infection of the gums and roots of the teeth. If we don't prevent or treat dental disease, your buddy will lose his teeth and be in danger of damaging his kidneys, liver, heart, and joints. In fact, the disease could shorten your pet's life by one to three years! We'll clean your dog's teeth regularly and let you know what you can do at home to keep those pearly whites clean.

### *Eye Problems*

Your cocker spaniel may inherit or develop a number of genetically linked eye conditions, including cataracts as early as age one (where the cornea becomes cloudy and your dog loses her sight), dry eye (where the tear glands don't produce enough tears), glaucoma (extremely painful pressure in the eye that causes blindness), and cherry eye (where the third eyelid is sore and swollen and pops out of the corner of the eye). In addition, because your cocker has eyeballs that bulge, and that distinctive shape of head, she is more vulnerable to eye injuries and eye sores that don't heal. In other words, your dog's eyes can cause her all kinds of problems, and they can be painful! We will perform diagnostic testing and evaluate her eyes at every examination.



To help prevent injuries, don't let your dog ride with her head out of the window. Some eye problems are medical emergencies and must be treated immediately, so call us right away if she has any problems with her eyes. Depending on the condition, medication and sometimes surgery is required.

### *Heart Disease*

Heart failure is a leading cause of death of cocker spaniels in their golden years, and 75% of the heart disease is caused by heart valve deterioration (sometimes called mitral valve disease). If your dog has a heart murmur or physical signs that suggest heart problems, we'll perform diagnostic testing to determine the severity of the disease. We'll repeat those same tests every year or so to monitor the condition. If valve disease is diagnosed early, we may be able to prescribe medications that could prolong his life for many years. Remember that proper dental care and weight control go a long way in preventing heart disease.

### *Infections*

In addition to ear infections, cocker spaniels are susceptible to other bacterial and viral infections—the same ones that all dogs can get—such as parvovirus, rabies, and distemper. Many of these infections are preventable through vaccination, which we'll administer to your dog based on the diseases we see in our area, her age, and other factors.

### *Obesity*

Obesity is a significant health problem in dogs and a serious disease that may cause arthritis, some types of cancer, back pain, and heart disease. Though it's tempting to give your pal food when he looks at you with those soulful eyes, you can love him to death with human food and treats.

### *Parasites*

All kinds of worms and bugs can invade your dog's body, inside and out. Everything from fleas to ticks to ear mites can infest her skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into her system in any number of ways: drinking unclean water, eating or stepping on feces, or being bitten by an infected mosquito. Some of these parasites can be transmitted to you or a family member and are a serious concern for everyone. For your friend, these parasites can cause pain, discomfort, and even death, so it's important that we test for them on a regular basis. We'll also recommend preventative medication as necessary to keep her healthy.

### *Skin Infections*

Your pal is susceptible to different kinds of skin infections and diseases. One of them is caused by yeast (Malassezia dermatitis). When it infects his ears, it causes itching, redness, and an accumulation of brown waxy discharge. On the skin, it leads to greasy, hairless areas, especially on the neck and throat, with a characteristic yeasty odor. Another common skin disease called seborrhea can cause dry, flaky skin or greasy, oily skin. A form of skin infection called lip-fold pyoderma occurs because the folds of skin along the lower jaw are usually moist, and bacteria readily gain a foothold there. These diseases make your pet itchy and uncomfortable. Bathing with special shampoos and rinses is helpful, and we'll treat any underlying problems such as allergies. The earlier you call to have skin problems checked out, the less likely it is that you will end up with an itchy, bald, smelly dog to take care of. You don't want that, and neither does he!

### *Spaying or Neutering*

One of the best things you can do for your cocker spaniel is to have her spayed (called neutering in males). In males, this means we surgically remove the testicles, and in females, it means we surgically remove the uterus and ovaries. Spaying or neutering decreases the likelihood of certain types of cancers and eliminates the possibility of your pet becoming pregnant or fathering unwanted puppies. Performing this surgery also gives us a chance, while your pet is under anesthesia, to evaluate and possibly address some of the diseases your cocker is likely to develop. This is convenient for you and easy for your friend. Don't worry; we'll let you know what specific problems we'll look for when the time arrives.

## **Taking Care of Your Cocker Spaniel at Home**

Much of what you can do to keep your dog happy and healthy is common sense, just like it is for people. Watch his diet, make sure he gets plenty of exercise, regularly brush his teeth and coat, and call us or a pet emergency hospital when something seems unusual (see "What to

Watch For” below). Be sure to adhere to the schedule of examinations and vaccinations that we recommend for him. This is when we’ll give him the necessary “check-ups” and test for diseases and conditions that are common in cocker spaniels. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures he will need throughout his life, and pet health insurance will help you cover those costs.

### *Routine Care*

Build her routine care into your schedule to help your Cocker spaniels live longer, stay healthy, and be happier during her lifetime.

- ✓ Brush her coat at least three times a week.
- ✓ Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don’t worry—we’ll show you how!
- ✓ Cockers have serious problems with their teeth, so you’ll need to brush them at least three times a week!

### *Diet and Exercise*

We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine. Overweight cockers are more prone to cancer, back pain, heart disease, arthritis, and other problems.

- ✓ Keep your dog’s diet consistent, and don’t give him people food.
- ✓ Feed a high-quality diet appropriate for his age.
- ✓ Exercise your dog regularly, and don’t overdo exercise.

### *What to Watch For*

Give us a call immediately if you notice any of these signs in your cocker spaniel:

- ✓ Vomiting or chronic diarrhea
- ✓ Weight loss or weight gain
- ✓ Lumps, bumps, and moles
- ✓ Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- ✓ Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- ✓ Limping or lameness
- ✓ Hair loss
- ✓ Coughing or difficulty breathing
- ✓ Episodes of weakness
- ✓ Pot-belly appearance
- ✓ Inability or straining to urinate
- ✓ Cloudiness, redness, itching or any other abnormality involving the eyes
- ✓ Change in appetite or water consumption
- ✓ Scratching or shaking the head, or discharge in the ear
- ✓ Redness in the ear or around the lips
- ✓ A foul odor about the ear or mouth
- ✓ Unusual behavior when you touch or rub the ear
- ✓ Dry, itchy, flaky, or oily skin
- ✓ Sudden inability or unwillingness to jump, go up stairs, or walk

## Partners in Health Care

DNA testing is a rapidly advancing field with tests being developed to help diagnose conditions before they become problems for your friend. For the most up-to-date information on DNA and other screening tests available for your pal, visit [www.Genesis4Pets.com](http://www.Genesis4Pets.com).

Your cocker spaniel counts on you to take good care of her, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that she lives a long and healthy life. Our goal is to ensure that your pal has the best health care possible: health care that's based on her breed, lifestyle, and age. Please contact us when you have questions or concerns.

## Health Evaluation Schedule for Cocker Spaniels

Now that you’ve read about the health issues we’ll be monitoring, we wanted to give you an at-a-glance summary of what services we’ll provide to keep your cocker spaniel happy and healthy. It may seem like your pet is prone to quite a few problems, but don’t worry; we’ll take the lead in keeping her healthy for a lifetime. We’ll review these health-care steps with you in more detail, but please feel free to ask questions or voice concerns at any time.

*Studies to determine the frequency of inheritance or disease in this breed either have not been completed or are inconclusive. There is a general consensus among canine genetic researchers and veterinary practitioners that the conditions we’ve described herein have a significant rate of incidence and/or impact in this breed.*



## How We'll Keep Your Cocker Spaniel Healthy

	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Cocker Spaniel-Specific Problems We're Looking For
Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years	○	6–8 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Internal parasite test and/or deworming Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Heart murmurs Hernias Proper dental alignment Parasites
	○	10–12 weeks	Brief physical examination Heartworm prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Proper growth rate Behavioral problems Parasites
	○	14–16 weeks	Brief physical examination Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss obedience training, nail trimming, and grooming Schedule spay/neuter surgery	Adult teeth coming in properly Skin infections Tonsillitis Parasites
	○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Presurgical diagnostics for spay or neuter surgery Blood clotting time	Internal organ health prior to spay/neuter surgery Bleeding disorders
	○	1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Heartworm test Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss diet, weight, and exercise	Back pain Cataracts and other eye problems Skin infections Excessive weight gain Behavioral problems Heartworms and other parasites
Adult: 18 to 39 in People Years	○	2 years through 7 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Internal organ health evaluation Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Back pain Cataracts and other eye problems Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Internal organ health and function Heartworms and other parasites
Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years	○	8 years through 10 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Senior internal organ health evaluation Tear test Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Back pain Cataracts and other eye problems Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Arthritis Internal organ health and function Dry eye Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites
Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years	○	11 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Golden years internal organ health evaluation Tear test Cancer screen Glaucoma screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Back pain Cataracts and other eye problems Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Arthritis Internal organ health and function Dry eye Signs of cancer Glaucoma Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites

Note: We recommend twice-a-year examinations so that we may diagnose problems sooner. This approach also gives you the budget-friendly option of spreading preventive testing over two visits rather than one.