

# Your Colossal Canine

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



## Giant Mixed Breeds: They're Unique!

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 really big dogs, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Docile and devoted
- Even temper and gentle disposition
- Loyal and easygoing with the people she knows
- Protective; excellent guard dog
- Good with children

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

- Can be strong-willed and difficult to train
- Territorial with larger dogs, especially of the same sex
- Overprotective of family and territory if not socialized properly
- Aloof toward strangers
- Has a relatively short lifespan
- Can seem stubborn

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

## Your Mixed-Breed Dog'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 friend.



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Knowing your pal's genetic make-up is an important step you can take to ensure his future health and happiness. Just because your pet looks like a great Dane doesn't mean he is a great Dane! And even if he is part great Dane, it doesn't mean he'll have the same behavioral tendencies or health problems as a great Dane. In fact, he could have inherited some of those traits from his parents or grandparents of entirely different breeds. We want to know which breeds your dog is so that we can tell you what to expect in terms of his behavior and health. That's why we recommend genetic testing for all mixed-breed dogs.

This guide, and the health evaluation schedule it contains, helps us and you plan for your pet's health-care needs. We walk you step by step through the health problems that are common in dogs that weigh more than 90 pounds. At the end of booklet, we've included a description of what you can do at home to keep your dog 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.

### *Bloat*

Gastric dilatation and volvulus, also known as bloat, usually occurs in dogs with deep, narrow chests, such as great Danes, bull mastiffs, and Irish wolfhounds. When a dog bloats, the stomach twists on itself and fills with gas. The twisting cuts off blood supply to the stomach, and sometimes the spleen. Left untreated, the disease is quickly fatal, sometimes in as little as 30 minutes. Your dog may retch or heave (but nothing comes out), act restless, have a pot belly, or lie in a prayer position (front feet down, rear end up). If you see signs, take her to an emergency hospital immediately! Preventive surgery in which the stomach is tacked down or sutured in place so that it cannot twist is an option.

### *Cancer*

Cancer is the most common cause of death of dogs in their golden years. Half of all cancers are cured by surgically

removing them, and some types are treatable with chemotherapy. We'll do periodic blood tests and look for lumps and bumps when we examine your pet. Many giant dogs, from the great Dane to the great Pyrenees, are especially prone to osteosarcoma (bone cancer). The symptoms are lameness and leg pain in a middle-aged or older dog. Early detection is critical! Call right away if you notice that he is limping or has a lump or bump. If he's 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. It starts with tartar build-up on the teeth and progresses to infection of the gums and roots of the teeth. We'll clean her teeth regularly and let you know what you can do at home to keep those pearly whites clean. It's also important to prevent broken or damaged teeth by avoiding certain kinds of toys and treats, including chew hooves, tennis balls, bones, and ice cubes.

### *Heart Disease*

Some giant breeds, including Newfoundlands, Neapolitan mastiffs, and great Danes, are especially prone to a kind of deadly heart problem known as dilated cardiomyopathy, in which the heart becomes so large, thin, and weak that it can no longer effectively pump blood to the body. Watch for your friend acting weak or tired, fainting or collapsing, breathing in a labored way, or coughing. We'll conduct an annual ECG screening after age one to look for abnormal heart rhythms and treat the condition with medication.

### *Hip and Elbow Dysplasia*

You've probably heard of this inherited disease that causes the hip joints to form improperly and leads to arthritis, but did you know it can also be a problem in your dog's elbows? Hip and elbow dysplasia are common problems in some very large dogs, such as the kuvasz, Rottweiler, Irish wolfhound, and Saint Bernard. You may notice that he has lameness in his hind legs or has difficulty getting up from lying down. We can treat the arthritis—the sooner the better—to avoid discomfort and pain. We'll take X-rays of your dog's joints to identify the disease as early as possible. Keep in mind that overweight dogs may develop arthritis two years earlier than those of normal weight, causing undue pain and suffering. Good nutrition and proper exercise are also very important to help reduce bone and joint problems as a pet gets older. Surgery is sometimes a good option in severe and life-limiting cases of hip dysplasia.

### *Infections*

Your dog is susceptible to 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.



### *Joint Disease*

If you allow your giant-breed puppy to grow too quickly, the cartilage in his joints may not attach to the bone properly. Surgery may be required to fix the problem, known as osteochondritis dessicans (OCD), so it's best to stick to our recommended growth rate of no more than four pounds per week. Don't overfeed him, weigh your puppy every three to four weeks, don't feed calcium supplements, and feed a large-breed puppy diet rather than an adult diet or a regular puppy diet.

### *Ligament Tear*

The cranial cruciate ligament is one of the four tough bands of tissue that hold each knee together. A torn cranial cruciate ligament is a common injury of active dogs, which may include your buddy. If not surgically corrected, she will eventually suffer from severe arthritis. Ouch! Keeping her at the right weight, feeding a high-quality diet, and avoiding too much jumping (like playing Frisbee) are the keys to avoiding this painful injury.

### *Neurological Disease*

A genetically linked neurological condition that occurs in some giant dogs—mixes with great Pyrenees, great Danes, and Irish wolfhounds, to name a few—causes a wobbly, drunken gait. This condition, known as wobbler disease or wobbler syndrome, happens because there is a narrowing of the vertebrae in the neck, which pinches the spinal cord and associated nerves. If the nerves don't send signals to the brain the way they're supposed to, your dog can't feel his feet. The first signs you'll notice are unstable hind legs, stumbling, and sometimes falling. Medications, neck braces, rehabilitation exercise programs, and surgery are treatment options.

### *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 she looks at you with those soulful eyes, you can love her 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 his skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into his 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 him healthy.

### *Skin Infections*

Some giant breeds, like the Saint Bernard, have excess skin along their jaws and are prone to a form of skin infection called lip-fold pyoderma. The disease occurs because the folds of skin along the lower jaw are usually moist. Bacteria can readily gain a foothold and cause a reddened, smelly area that is uncomfortable for your dog. We will check for this condition upon examination, but let us know if you see signs. We'll recommend treatment with ointments and antibiotics as necessary. When symptoms are severe, the excess skin folds can be surgically removed.

### *Spaying or Neutering*

One of the best things you can do for your pup 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 dog 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.

### *Thyroid Problems*

Some giant-breed dogs, such as those mixed with Rottweiler, are prone to a common condition called hypothyroidism in which the body doesn't make enough thyroid hormone. Signs can include dry skin and coat, hair loss, susceptibility to other skin diseases, weight gain, lethargy, mental dullness, sleeping excessively, fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes. We'll conduct a blood screening test annually to look for the disease. Treatment is usually simple: replacement hormones given in the form of a pill.

## Taking Care of Your Colossal Canine 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 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 giant breeds. 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, Diet, and Exercise*

Build her routine care into your schedule to help your dog live longer, stay healthy, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine. Overweight dogs are more prone to cancer, ligament tears, arthritis, and other problems.

- ✓ Brush her teeth at least three times a week.
- ✓ Keep your dog’s diet consistent, and don’t give her people food.
- ✓ Feed a high-quality diet appropriate for her age.
- ✓ Exercise your dog regularly, and don’t overdo exercise.
- ✓ Don’t let your dog chew on bones, ice cubes, hooves, or tennis balls.

### *What to Watch For*

Give us a call immediately if you notice any of these signs:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Itchy skin (scratching or licking)
- ✓ Change in appetite or water consumption
- ✓ Scratching or shaking the head, or discharge in the ear
- ✓ Redness or a foul odor about the lips

## Partners in Health Care

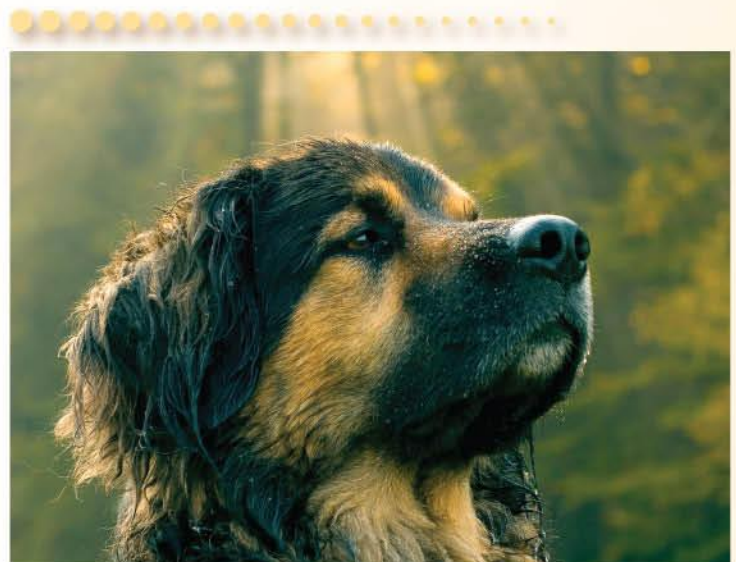
DNA testing is a rapidly advancing field with tests being developed to help diagnose conditions before they become problems for your friend. For the most up-to-date information on DNA and other screening tests available for your pal, visit [www.Genesis4Pets.com](http://www.Genesis4Pets.com).

Your dog counts on you to take good care of him, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that he 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 his size, lifestyle, and age. And remember, we can help you manage your dog’s health more effectively once we’ve identified his breeds through genetic testing. Please contact us when you have questions or concerns.

## Health Evaluation Schedule for Giant Mixed-Breed Dogs

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 dog 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 mixed breeds 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 giant mixed-breed dogs.*



# How We'll Keep Your Dog Healthy

*Puppy to Adolescent:  
Infant to 17 in People Years*

	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Giant-Breed Problems We're Looking For
	○	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 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 Gait and lameness examination Presurgical diagnostics for spay or neuter surgery Stomach tuck Hip and elbow evaluation Genetic testing	Joint disease Internal organ health prior to spay/neuter surgery Prevention of bloat Hip and elbow dysplasia Breed composition
	○	1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Heartworm test Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss diet, weight, and exercise	Skin infections Excessive weight gain Behavioral problems Joint disease Hip and elbow dysplasia Heartworms and other parasites
<i>Adult: 18 to 39 in People Years</i>	○	2 years through 5 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Internal organ health evaluation Thyroid testing Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Hip and elbow dysplasia Internal organ health and function Thyroid function Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites
<i>Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years</i>	○	6 years through 7 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Senior internal organ health evaluation Thyroid testing Cancer screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Hip and elbow dysplasia Arthritis Internal organ health and function Thyroid function Signs of cancer Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites
<i>Senior: 60+ in People Years</i>	○	8 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Golden years internal organ health evaluation Thyroid testing Cancer screen Glaucoma screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Skin infections Dental disease Healthy weight Arthritis Internal organ health and function Thyroid function 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.