

Your Shih Tzu

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



Shih Tzus: 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 shih tzus, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Hypoallergenic coat sheds very little
- Excellent companion and family dog
- Sweet, playful, and friendly
- Requires minimal exercise

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

- Coat requires regular grooming
- Not easily trained
- Prone to a number of health problems
- An indoor dog that doesn't do well in the heat

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

Your Shih Tzu'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 shih tzu.

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 shih tzus



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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 booklet, we've included a description of what you can do at home to keep your shih tzu 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

Shih tzus 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.

Back Problems

Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) is a common condition in shih tzus. 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. She may even drag her back feet or be suddenly paralyzed and unable to get up or use her back legs. If you see symptoms, don't wait. Call us or an emergency clinic immediately! For less severe cases, rest and medication may resolve the problem. In many cases involving paralysis, we'll recommend surgical removal of the ruptured discs (within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms to get the best results). As with so many other diseases, weight control helps to prevent this problem.

Dental Disease

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. Shih tzus are more likely than other dogs to develop this condition. 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, your shih tzu's life span may be cut short 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 shih tzu can inherit or develop a number of different eye conditions, including eyelashes that grow abnormally, inadequate blinking that leads to damaged corneas, cataracts, dry eye, and abnormalities in her retinas. In other words, your dog's eyes can cause her all kinds of problems, and they can be painful. Ouch! We will evaluate her eyes at every examination and conduct a tear test routinely to determine if she has dry eye. Because she has eyeballs that bulge, she is also more prone to have an eyeball pop out of its socket if there is undue pressure on her neck. Be sure to use a harness and not a neck collar when walking your pet, and never use a choke chain.

Fluid Build-up in the Skull

Water on the brain, or hydrocephalus, occurs when fluid builds up inside the skull and puts pressure on the brain tissue. This condition is most common in breeds with dome-shaped heads, like your shih tzu. It is often present when the skull bones don't fuse properly. Signs include seizures, difficulty training the puppy, dulled mental function, circling, and a spastic gait. We'll do testing if symptoms develop. Sometimes surgery can alleviate the problem.

Heart Disease

Heart failure is a leading cause of death in older shih tzus, and 75% of the heart disease is caused by valve deterioration. If your dog has a heart murmur or physical signs that suggest heart problems, we'll do 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 your pet's life for many years. Proper dental care and weight control also go a long way in preventing heart disease.

Infections

Shih tzus are 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, his age, and other factors.



Kidney Disease

Shih tzus are prone to renal dysplasia, an inherited form of kidney disease, and it can affect your dog as early as puppyhood. Signs include excessive drinking of water and urine production; poor appetite or weight loss; and eventually vomiting and diarrhea. If your dog shows signs, we'll perform diagnostic testing to be sure. If she has the disease, we'll treat it with a special diet, fluid support as needed, and sometimes medication.

Kidney Stones

There are half a dozen different types of stones that can form in the kidney or in the bladder, and shih tzus are more likely to develop them than other breeds. We'll periodically test for the presence of kidney and bladder stones; they are painful! If your dog has blood in his urine, can't urinate, or is straining to urinate, it is a medical emergency. Call us immediately!

Knee Problems

Sometimes a shih tzu's kneecap will slip out of place (called patellar luxation). You might notice that she runs along and suddenly picks up a back leg and skips or hops for a few strides. If the problem is mild and involves only one leg, your shih tzu may not require much treatment beyond arthritis medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery is needed to realign the kneecap to keep it from popping out of place. Rehabilitation and special exercises can be very helpful.

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.

Spaying or Neutering

One of the best things you can do for your shih tzu is to have him neutered (called spaying in females). 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 shih tzu 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.

Tracheal Collapse

The trachea, or windpipe, is made up of rings of cartilage, making it look something like a vacuum cleaner's ridged hose. Just as in the hose, this structure provides flexibility and strength. In shih tzus, the cartilage rings are sometimes weak or have formed incorrectly. The trachea can collapse and become too narrow, which leads to coughing and difficulty breathing. Most cases of tracheal collapse are mild and are treated symptomatically with medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery may be an option.

Taking Care of Your Shih Tzu 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 shih tzus. 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 shih tzu live longer, stay healthy, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine. Overweight shih tzus are more prone to cancer, arthritis, back pain, and other problems.

- ✓ Brush her coat at least weekly.
- ✓ 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.

What to Watch For

Give us a call immediately if you notice any of these signs in your shih tzu:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Hopping or skipping while running
- ✓ Unwillingness to jump up or go up stairs

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.

Your shih tzu 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 breed, lifestyle, and age. Please contact us when you have questions or concerns.

Health Evaluation Schedule for Shih Tzus

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 shih tzu 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 Shih Tzu Healthy

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

*Adult: 18 to 39 in
People Years*

*Senior: 40 to 59
in People Years*

*Senior: 40 to 59
in People Years*

(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Shih Tzu-Specific Problems We're Looking For
<input type="radio"/>	6–8 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Internal parasite test and/or deworming Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Abnormal skull formation Heart murmurs Hernias Proper dental alignment Parasites
<input type="radio"/>	10–12 weeks	Brief physical examination Heartworm prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth at home	Proper growth rate Behavioral problems Parasites
<input type="radio"/>	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
<input type="radio"/>	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Presurgical diagnostics for spay or neuter surgery Knee evaluation	Eye abnormalities Internal organ health prior to spay/neuter surgery Kidney disease Knee problems
<input type="radio"/>	1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Gait and lameness examination Heartworm test Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss diet, weight, and exercise	Excessive weight gain Behavioral problems Knee problems Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	2 years through 8 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Gait and lameness examination Tear test Internal organ health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Back pain Healthy weight Eye abnormalities Knee problems Dry eye Internal organ health and function Kidney or bladder stones Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	9 years through 11 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Tear test Senior internal organ health evaluation Cancer screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Back pain Eye abnormalities Dry eye Arthritis Internal organ health and function Kidney or bladder stones Signs of cancer Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	12 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Tear test Golden years internal organ health evaluation Cancer screen Glaucoma screening Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Back pain Arthritis Eye abnormalities Dry eye Internal organ health and function Kidney or bladder stones 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.