

## **Collapsed Trachea:**

### **The Health Problem Every Owner of a Small Dog Should Understand**

Have you ever heard a dog cough, take shallow, quick breaths, and honk like a goose?

Those are symptoms of a collapsed trachea, a health problem found almost exclusively in Toy and other miniature dog breeds.

Not every Toy breed will develop this but enough do (estimates range from 20% to 40%) that owners should learn more about this condition.

Highest risk breeds are Chihuahuas, Italian Greyhounds, Maltese, Pomeranians, Toy Poodles and Yorkshire Terriers.

The trachea or windpipe is held open by rings of cartilage. When the cartilage weakens, the trachea begins to collapse and the amount of air that can get through is severely restricted.

This condition usually appears between the ages of 4 to 14 years. The restricted airflow puts excess stress on the heart and lungs.

Heat, humidity and excitement exacerbate the problem. A dog will have trouble breathing and may try to vomit to clear his airway.

A dog with a collapsed trachea usually can't exercise without having problems and in some severe cases, may even pass out from lack of air. Any exercise is likely to fatigue him.

If your dog does develop symptoms, the condition usually can be managed with medication and restricted activity. Sometimes children's flavored cough suppressants can help or your veterinarian may want you to use a prescription brand to treat coughs.

In more severe cases, steroids may be used for a time to reduce inflammation in the trachea. Because of their side effects, including weight gain, they are seldom used for long.

In worst cases, the dog's tongue and gums turn blue and acute attacks require hospitalization. About 1% of dogs with this condition do die from complications.

A surgical procedure that uses stents to widen the trachea is available, but this is a risky and expensive surgery that should only be done as a last resort and only by a veterinary specialist.

Although the condition is congenital or inherited, there are things that an owner can do to lessen the onset or severity of the condition:

1. Feed your dog a high quality dog food. Proper nutrition helps formation of cartilage especially in the puppy years.
2. Don't overfeed, however, as overweight dogs are affected more than others.
3. Use a harness rather than a collar when walking your dog. He can wear a collar with his tags but don't attach a leash that adds pressure and pulling around his neck.

4. Don't smoke around your dog. You wouldn't smoke around a human baby, would you? Remember that it doesn't take much smoke to damage the airway of a 5-pound dog.
5. Keep vaccinations up to date. This helps prevent respiratory infections.

Watch your dog for symptoms and ensure that he gets treatment if any symptoms do develop. Most affected dogs can lead normal, although somewhat restricted, lives.

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