Your Chihuahua

Caring for Your Faithful Companion

Chihuahuas:
What a Unique Breed!

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

- Alert, curious, and busy
- Adaptable to a wide variety of living conditions
- Confident and self-reliant
- Vigilant watchdog with a ready bark
- Doesn’t need much exercise

However, no dog is perfect! You may have also noticed these characteristics:

- Needs early socialization to accept other pets and strangers
- Fragile and easily injured due to small size
- Needs frequent attention from family
- Bold and fearless, may attack much larger dogs
- May have a tendency to bark excessively

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She is a loyal and alert member of the family that demands attention at all times. Her small size also makes her an excellent traveling companion.

The Chihuahua is the smallest of all dogs breeds and has smooth and long-haired coat varieties. Originating in Mexico, Chihuahuas were bred for companionship. They are best known for their big, erect ears and large, prominent eyes. The Chihuahua’s personality is comparable to a terrier’s—fearless and devoted. Chihuahuas are a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 12-14 years.
General Health Information for your Chihuahua

Dental Disease
Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. Unfortunately, your Chihuahua is more likely than other dogs to have problems with her teeth. Dental disease 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 may lose her teeth and be in danger of damage to her kidneys, liver, heart, and joints. In fact, your Chihuahua’s life span may even 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.

Infections
Chihuahuas are susceptible to bacterial and viral infections — the same ones that all dogs can get — such as parvo, rabies, and distemper. Many of these infections are preventable through vaccination, which we will recommend based on her age, the diseases we see in our area, and other factors.

Obesity
Obesity can be a significant health problem in Chihuahuas. It is a serious disease that may cause or worsen joint problems, metabolic and digestive disorders, 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 leftover people food and doggie treats. Instead, give her a hug, brush her fur or teeth, play a game with her, or perhaps take her for a walk. She’ll feel better, and so will you!

Parasites
All kinds of worms and bugs can invade your Chi’s body, inside and out. Everything from fleas and ticks to ear mites can infest her skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into her system in a number of ways: drinking unclean water, walking on contaminated soil, 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 canine 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.

Spay or Neuter
One of the best things you can do for your Chihuahua is to have her spayed (neutered for males). In females, this means we surgically remove the ovaries and usually the uterus, and in males, it means we surgically remove the testicles. 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 identify and address some of the diseases your dog is likely to develop. For example, if your pet needs hip X-rays or a puppy tooth extracted, this would be a good time — it’s more convenient for you and easier on your friend too. Routine blood testing prior to surgery also helps us to identify and take precautions against...
The severity of the disease. The same tests will need to suggest a heart murmur. If your dog has a heart murmur or outward signs of heart disease (sometimes called mitral valve disease) have a heart examination before we perform surgery. Your Chihuahua is prone to a bleeding disorder called hemophilia. We’ll conduct diagnostic testing to assess his blood clotting time before we perform surgery. This is an important test as we may not otherwise know whether your pet has hemophilia until severe bleeding occurs during surgery or after a serious injury.
Liver Problems

Your Chi is more likely than other dogs to have a liver disorder called portosystemic shunt (PSS). Some of the blood supply that should go to the liver goes around it instead, depriving the liver of the blood flow it needs to grow and function properly. If your friend has PSS, his liver cannot remove toxins from his bloodstream effectively. To check for this problem, we’ll conduct a liver function test in addition to a standard pre-anesthetic panel every time he undergoes anesthesia. If he develops symptoms such as stunted growth or seizures, we’ll test his blood and possibly conduct an ultrasound scan of his liver. Surgery may be needed, but in some cases, we can treat with a special diet and medication.

Bladder or Kidney Stones

There are a few different types of stones that can form in the kidney or in the bladder, and Chihuahuas are more likely to develop them than other breeds. We’ll periodically test his urine for telltale signs indicating the presence of kidney and bladder stones, which in addition are very painful! If your buddy has blood in his urine, can’t urinate, or is straining to urinate, it is a medical emergency. Call us immediately!

Reproductive Difficulties

Breeds with a large head and small pelvis are more prone to difficulties during the birthing process. The female’s pelvis may be too small to pass the puppies’ heads and a C-section is often required for her health and that of her puppies. If you are interested in breeding your Chihuahua, speak with us first. We can help you make an informed decision based on the body conformations of both sire and dam.

Retained Puppy Teeth

Dogs normally begin to lose their primary (“puppy”) teeth at around 4 months of age. If the primary teeth don’t fall out as the adult teeth come in, infection or damage to the adult teeth may occur. Retained puppy teeth crowd the incoming adult teeth and can trap food and hair between the teeth causing cavities and infections. Painful gums, bad breath, and adult tooth loss can result if untreated. Retained teeth are common in small breeds like Chihuahuas, but we’ll monitor your pet’s growing teeth at each exam and discuss removal of any retained puppy teeth with you when indicated.

Neurologic Problems

Several neurologic diseases can afflict Chihuahuas. Symptoms of neurological problems can include seizures, imbalance, tremors, weakness, or excessive sleeping. The health care chart included in this care guide will list the specific conditions we will be monitoring for. If you notice any of these symptoms, please seek immediate veterinary care.

Low Blood Sugar

Hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, is a common condition in young, small-breed dogs, like your Chihuahua. Physical signs of hypoglycemia include weakness, collapse, and seizures. Hypoglycemia may occur after exercise, periods of excitement, or after missing a meal. If your little one shows any of these signs, call us right away! Most pets outgrow the tendency to hypoglycemic reactions, but it’s important to control an affected pet’s blood sugar while he’s young.

Allergies

In humans, allergies to pollen, mold, or dust make people sneeze. In dogs, rather than sneezing, allergies make their skin itchy. We call this skin allergy “atopy”, and Chihuahuas often have it. The feet, belly, folds of the skin, and ears are most commonly affected. Symptoms typically start between the ages of one and three and can get worse every year. Licking the paws, rubbing the face, and frequent ear infections are the most common signs of allergies. The good news is that there are many treatment options available for these conditions.

Spinal Cord Injuries

Chihuahuas are more likely than other breeds to have instability in the first two neck vertebrae (called the atlantal and axial vertebrae). This condition can cause sudden spinal-cord injuries in the neck. If your dog is suddenly unable or unwilling to jump or go up stairs, his cries for no apparent reason, or if he tries to turn or lower his head when you pick him up, he may be in severe pain, and you should call us immediately! We’ll control the pain with medication, although surgery may also be recommended. As with so many other diseases, weight control helps to prevent injuries from this condition. With this breed, it’s also important to set up ramps or stairs in your home from the time your pet is a puppy to save him a lifetime of stressing his neck when jumping on and off the furniture.

Mange

Demodex is a microscopic mite that lives in the hair follicles of all dogs. Normally a dog’s immune system keeps the mites in check, but some breeds, like your Chihuahua, may develop an overabundance of these mites. In mild cases, pet owners may notice a few dry, irritated, hairless lesions. These often occur on the face or feet and may or may not be itchy. Secondary skin infections may also occur. Prompt veterinary care is important to keep the disease from getting out of hand. Many pets seem to outgrow the problem, while others require lifelong management.

Water on the Brain

Hydrocephalus occurs when fluid builds up inside the skull, putting pressure on the brain. This condition is most common...
in breeds with dome-shaped heads, like your Chihuahua. Hydrocephalus most often occurs when the skull bones don’t fuse properly after birth. Signs of hydrocephalus include seizures, dulled mental function, circling, and a spastic gait. Owners of affected pets report that training is also more difficult. Hydrocephalus is usually diagnosed early in life, but is occasionally diagnosed in adult dogs as well. We’ll keep this risk in mind during your pet’s visits, recommend early testing for the condition, and discuss effective treatment options if symptoms develop.

**Taking Care of Your Chihuahua 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 her diet, make sure she gets plenty of exercise, regularly brush her 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 her. This is when we’ll give her the necessary “check-ups” and test for diseases and conditions that are common in Chihuahuas. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures she will need throughout her 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 Chi live longer, stay healthier, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine.

- Supervise your pet as you would a toddler. Keep doors closed, pick up after yourself, and block off rooms as necessary. This will keep her out of trouble and away from objects she shouldn’t put in her mouth.
- Brush her coat as needed, at least weekly to prevent mats and keep her coat shiny.
- Chihuahuas generally have good teeth, and you can keep them perfect by brushing them at least twice a week!
- Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don’t worry—we’ll show you how!
- Chis are very sensitive to cold, so a warm winter wardrobe is necessary.
- She is well suited for apartment living; she will need a daily walk and regular inside play.
- Due to her assertive nature and small size, she is not recommended for homes with small children.
- 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, but don’t overdo it at first.

**What to Watch For**

Any abnormal symptom could be a sign of serious disease or it could just be a minor or temporary problem. The important thing is to be able to tell when to seek veterinary help and how urgently. Many diseases cause dogs to have a characteristic combination of symptoms, which together can be a clear signal that your Chihuahua needs help.

**Office calls**

Give us a call for an appointment if you notice any of these types of signs:

- Change in appetite or water consumption
- Tartar build-up, bad breath, red gums, or broken teeth
- Itchy skin (scratching, chewing, or licking); hair loss
- Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- Increasing hip pain at less than a year old
- Slow or stunted growth; sometimes seizures after eating
- Dry, scaly, sometimes itchy, hairless patches on face or paws

**Emergencies**

Seek medical care immediately if you notice any of these types of signs:

- Scratching or shaking the head, tender ears, or ear discharge
- Inability or straining to urinate; discolored urine
- Cloudiness, redness, itching, or any other abnormality involving the eyes
- Coughing, especially at night or upon rising after sleeping; rapid breathing at rest
- Bruises easily or bleeds a lot from even small wounds
- Unwilling to jump, cries when moving head
- Seizures, dull demeanor, spastic gait
Genetic/DNA Testing

DNA analysis is a rapidly advancing field in healthcare for people and pets. Luckily, technologies exist to screen for hundreds of inherited diseases in pets, just like in people. By screening each pet for as many genetic diseases as possible, we will be better prepared to care for your pet throughout life. This is an important step in caring for your pet because it’s always better to know your pal is at risk for a genetic disease before the problem is untreatable.

In an effort to screen for as many genetically linked diseases as possible, we may recommend the K9Genetics™ Disease Screen to screen for more than 150 genetic mutations that cause disease.

Each K9Genetics™ Disease Screen Screens for

✓ Over 30 Musculoskeletal Problems
✓ Over 30 Metabolic Conditions
✓ Over 30 Eye Conditions
✓ Over 25 Blood and Clotting Disorders
✓ Over 10 Immune System Diseases
✓ Over 10 Urinary Tract Problems
✓ 10 Skin and Hair Conditions
✓ Cancer
✓ Dental Disease
✓ Drug Metabolism
✓ Heart Problems
✓ Hormonal Conditions
✓ Liver/Gastrointestinal Diseases
✓ Midline Defect
✓ Neuromuscular Diseases
✓ Reproduction Problems
✓ Respiratory Conditions

This one-time test is one of the best decisions you can make for your Chihuahua’s medical care. With less than a few drops of blood, we’ll have a lifetime of information to assist us in providing the very best care of your friend’s unique and individual needs throughout her life!

For more information about genetic testing, visit http://www.k9genetics.com

Your Chihuahua 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 provide 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:

Pet Medical Center
254-690-6769

References:
## Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

### How We’ll Keep Your Chihuahua Healthy

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<td>Discuss lifetime genetic considerations</td>
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Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

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| **Adult: 18 to 39 in People Years** | Head-to-tail physical examination  
Eye disease screen  
Heart health check  
Skin and coat exam  
Internal organ health evaluation  
Bone and joint exam  
Neurologic assessment  
Blood disorder evaluation  
Parasite prevention  
Vaccinations  
Discuss behavior and nutrition | Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus  
Glaucoma, Cataracts, and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS)  
Portosystemic shunt (PSS) and Mitral valvular disease  
Allergies  
Urolithiasis and Tracheal collapse  
Patellar luxation  
Myasthenia gravis  
Hemophilia |
| 8 years through 10 years | Head-to-tail physical examination  
Eye disease screen  
Heart health check  
Skin and coat exam  
Internal organ health evaluation  
Bone and joint exam  
Neurologic assessment  
Blood disorder evaluation  
Parasite prevention  
Vaccinations  
Discuss mental and physical well-being | Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus  
Glaucoma, Cataracts, and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS)  
Mitral valvular disease  
Allergies  
Urolithiasis and Tracheal collapse  
Patellar luxation  
Myasthenia gravis  
Hemophilia |
| **Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years** | Head-to-tail physical examination  
Eye disease screen  
Heart health check  
Skin and coat exam  
Internal organ health evaluation  
Bone and joint exam  
Neurologic assessment  
Blood disorder evaluation  
Parasite prevention  
Vaccinations | Breast-specific physical abnormalities plus  
Glaucoma, Cataracts, and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS)  
Mitral valvular disease  
Allergies  
Urolithiasis and Tracheal collapse  
Patellar luxation  
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| 11 years and older | Head-to-tail physical examination  
Eye disease screen  
Heart health check  
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Internal organ health evaluation  
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Discuss mental and physical well-being | Breast-specific physical abnormalities plus  
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Urolithiasis and Tracheal collapse  
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Myasthenia gravis  
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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.