

# Your Akita

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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Your Akita

## Akitas: 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 Akitas, sometimes known as Silent Hunters, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Loving and loyal to her owners
- Quiet—not much of a barker
- Docile and devoted
- Protective; excellent guard dog
- Adaptable to a wide variety of living conditions
- Large, strong, and athletic

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

- Must be properly socialized as a puppy to avoid aggression as an adult
- Can be strong-willed and difficult to train
- Aggressive toward other animals
- Coat sheds heavily and needs to be brushed regularly
- Doesn't do well in the heat
- Is a bit “mouthy”—likes to carry and chew things

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She's a protective and affectionate dog who needs a strong leader, daily exercise, and enjoys time spent hanging out with her family.

Akitas are large and powerful dogs that require a firm and consistent leader to give them the early training and socialization that they require. They are natural guard dogs who rarely bark without reason. Akitas prefer to be with their families—they do not do well when left outside alone. And due to their thick double coats, this breed does not thrive in the heat. Akitas are generally healthy, but can be prone to some diseases, like hypothyroidism and hip dysplasia. Akitas are a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 12-15 years.



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## General Health Information for your Akita

### Dental

**Dental disease** is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. Unfortunately, your Akita 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 Akita'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

Akitas 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 Akitas. 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 Silent Hunter'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 preventive medication as necessary to keep her healthy.

### Spay or Neuter

One of the best things you can do for your Akita 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

## Your Akita's Health

We know that because you care so much about your dog, you want to take good care of her. That is why we have summarized the health concerns we will be discussing with you over the life of your Akita. By knowing about health concerns specific to Akitas, we can tailor a preventive health plan to watch for and hopefully prevent some predictable risks.

Many diseases and health conditions are genetic, meaning they are related to your pet's breed. There is a general consensus among canine genetic researchers and veterinary practitioners that the conditions described herein have a significant rate of incidence and/or impact in this breed. That does not mean your dog will have these problems; it just means that she is more at risk than other dogs. We will describe the most common issues seen in Akitas to give you an idea of what may come up in her future. Of course, we can't cover every possibility here, so always check with us if you notice any unusual signs or symptoms.

This guide contains general health information important to all canines as well as the most important genetic predispositions for Akitas. This information helps you and us together plan for your pet's unique medical needs. At the end of the booklet, we have also included a description of what you can do at home to keep your Silent Hunter looking and feeling her best. You will know what to watch for, and we will all feel better knowing that we're taking the best possible care of your pal.



common problems that increase anesthetic or surgical risk. Don't worry; we'll discuss the specific problems we will be looking for when the time arrives.

## Genetic Predispositions for Akitas

### *Bloat*

**Gastric dilatation volvulus**, also known as GDV or bloat, usually occurs in dogs with deep, narrow chests. This means your Akita is more at risk than other breeds. When a dog bloats, the stomach twists on itself and fills with gas. The twisting cuts off the blood supply to the stomach and sometimes to the spleen. Left untreated, the disease is quickly fatal, sometimes in as little as half an hour. Your dog may retch or heave (but little or nothing comes up), act restless, have an enlarged abdomen, or lie in a prayer position (front feet down, rear end up). Preventive surgery in which the stomach is tacked down or sutured in place so that it is unlikely to twist is an option. If you see symptoms, take your pet to an emergency hospital immediately!

### *Thyroid Problems*

Akitas 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, fearfulness, aggression, and other behavioral changes. We'll conduct a blood test annually to screen for this disease. Treatment is usually as simple as replacement hormones given in the form of a pill.

### *Cancer*

Cancer is a leading cause of death in older dogs. Your Akita will likely live longer than many other breeds and therefore is more prone to get cancer in his golden years. Many cancers are curable by surgical removal, and some types are treatable with chemotherapy. Early detection is critical! We'll perform periodic diagnostic tests and look for lumps and bumps when we examine your pet.

- **Lymphoma** or lymphosarcoma is a type of cancer that afflicts Akitas more than other breeds. This disease

makes the body form abnormal lymphocytes, which are a type of white blood cell. Because white blood cells can be found throughout the body, this cancer can show up almost anywhere. Lymphoma is a very treatable form of cancer with an excellent success rate in dogs receiving chemotherapy. Luckily, lymphoma is one of the few types of cancer that can often be found with a blood test, so we may recommend a complete blood count twice yearly. Watch for swollen glands (ask us, we'll show you where to look), weight loss, or labored breathing at home and be sure to call us if you notice any unusual symptoms.

- **Osteosarcoma** is the most common bone tumor in dogs. It typically afflicts middle-aged large and giant breeds like your Akita. Early symptoms include lameness and leg pain. Early detection is critical! Call right away if you notice that your dog is limping. Osteosarcoma is a painful and aggressive tumor, and the sooner it is removed, the better his prognosis.

### *Bone and Joint Problems*

A number of different musculoskeletal problems have been reported in Akitas. While it may seem overwhelming, each condition can be diagnosed and treated to prevent undue pain and suffering. With diligent observation at home and knowledge about the diseases that may affect your friend's bones, joints, or muscles you will be able to take great care of him throughout his life.

- Both hips and elbows are at risk for **dysplasia**, an inherited disease that causes the joints to develop improperly and results in arthritis. Stiffness in your Akita's elbows or hips may become a problem for him, especially as he matures. You may notice that he begins to show lameness in his legs or has difficulty getting up from lying down. We can treat the arthritis—the sooner the better—to minimize discomfort and pain. We'll take X-rays of your dog's bones to identify issues as early as possible. Surgery is also sometimes a good option in severe and life-limiting cases. And keep in mind that overweight dogs may develop arthritis years earlier than those of normal weight, causing undue pain and suffering!
- Many older dogs have arthritis, and bigger dogs tend to have more pain and disability than smaller ones. Akitas are particularly prone to developing arthritis, but various treatments are available. The earlier we begin treatment, the better the results. Good nutrition and proper exercise are also very important to help reduce bone and joint problems as your pet gets older. Don't let your pet become overweight, and save him a huge strain on his joints.

### *Skin Conditions*

Akitas are prone to a variety of skin problems, including **sebaceous adenitis**. You may notice that your dog has dry, scaly skin with patches of hair loss along the top of his head, back of the neck, and along his back. This condition typically develops when your dog is between one and five years of age.

Treatment is generally long term, and we'll likely try a combination of approaches to determine which is most effective with your dog. The response to treatment is highly variable, but you'll almost always need to give fatty acid supplements and use special shampoos to remove dead skin and hair. The earlier the skin is checked out, the better the results.

### 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 Akitas 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.

### VKH Syndrome

This complex disease, found at higher incidence in Akitas, is also known as **uveodermatologic syndrome**: "uveo" refers to the inside of the eye and "derm" refers to the skin. This is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the cells that make pigment in the skin and inside the eyes. It can cause pain or blindness inside the eye and can change the pigmented areas of the nose, lips, and skin from dark to light. Sunlight can also worsen the condition.

### Autoimmune Skin Disease

**Pemphigus foliaceus** is a superficial skin disease that is more common in Akitas. It often starts around four years of age and causes crusts and hair loss, usually on top of the nose and inside the ear flaps. Some dogs get it on their footpads and toenails as well. Bacteria easily invade the damaged areas, so secondary skin infections are common. Skin crusts typically wax and wane; there is no cure, but there are a variety of effective treatments. Sunlight makes it worse, so applying zinc-free sunscreen to sensitive parts before heading outdoors can help.

### Eye Problems

Not many things have as dramatic an impact on your dog's quality of life as the proper functioning of his eyes. Unfortunately, Akitas can inherit or develop a number of different eye conditions, some of which may cause blindness if not treated right away, and most of which can be extremely painful! We will evaluate his eyes at every examination to look for any signs for concern.

- **Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)** is an inherited disease in which the eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. Unfortunately, Akitas are a bit more likely than other dogs to have this condition. PRA is not painful, but also not curable. In dogs with this gene, early symptoms such as night blindness or dilated pupils generally begin around three to five years of age. A genetic test is available for this condition.
- **Glaucoma**, an eye condition that affects Akitas and people too, is an extremely painful disease that rapidly leads to blindness if left untreated. Symptoms include squinting, watery eyes, bluing of the cornea (the clear front part of the eye), and redness in the whites of the eyes. Pain is rarely noticed by pet owners though it is frequently there and can be severe. People who have

certain types of glaucoma often report it feels like being stabbed in the eye with an ice pick! Yikes! In advanced cases, the eye may look enlarged or swollen like it's bulging. We'll perform an annual glaucoma screening to diagnose and start treatment as early as possible. Glaucoma is a medical emergency. If you see symptoms, don't wait to call us, go to an emergency clinic!

- **Cataracts** are a common cause of blindness in older Akitas. We'll watch for the lenses of his eyes to become more opaque—meaning they look cloudy instead of clear—when we examine him. Many dogs adjust well to losing their vision and get along just fine. Surgery to remove cataracts and restore sight may also be an option.

### Epilepsy

There are three types of seizures in dogs: reactive, secondary, and primary. Reactive seizures are caused by the brain's reaction to a metabolic problem like low blood sugar, organ failure, or a toxin. Secondary seizures are the result of a brain tumor, stroke, or trauma. If no other cause can be found, the disease is called primary or **idiopathic epilepsy**. This problem is often an inherited condition, and Akitas are commonly afflicted. If your friend is prone to seizures, episodes will usually begin between six months and three years of age. An initial diagnostic workup may help find the cause. Lifelong medication is usually necessary to help keep seizures under control with periodic blood testing required to monitor side effects and efficacy. If your dog has a seizure, carefully prevent him from injuring himself, but don't try to control his mouth or tongue. It won't help him, and he may bite you accidentally! Note the length of the seizure, and call us or an emergency hospital.

### Deafness

Heritable deafness has been noted in some Silent Hunter bloodlines, so if his ears are healthy and he's still ignoring you, a more thorough hearing workup may be needed, including brainwave analysis, if indicated. If you suspect he may not be hearing as well as he should, schedule an appointment with us



right away as the problem could also be caused by a severe ear infection.

### *Dental Abnormalities*

Teeth abnormalities are often genetically induced and are relatively common in dogs, especially in purebred dogs like your Akita. An overbite or underbite is called a malocclusion or a bad bite. Oligodontia is a condition where only a few teeth are present. Misaligned teeth can also occur and cause lots of problems, but can usually be corrected with braces or extractions. (Yes, dogs can get braces!) We want to keep your buddy's teeth healthy, so we will be watching his developing teeth closely. The lifetime health care chart included in this care guide will list the specific conditions we will be monitoring for.

### *Kidney Disease*

Akitas are prone to renal dysplasia, a genetic form of kidney disease, that can affect your dog as early as puppyhood. Signs include excessive water drinking and urine production, poor appetite or weight loss, and eventually vomiting and diarrhea. If your dog shows signs of this disease, we'll perform diagnostic tests to be sure. Treatment may include medication, fluid therapy, and a special diet.

## **Taking Care of Your Akita 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 Akitas. 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 Silent Hunter 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.
- ✓ Akitas often have serious problems with their teeth, so you'll need to brush them at least three times a week!
- ✓ Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don't worry—

we'll show you how!

- ✓ She's a large dog with lots of energy, so keep her mind and body active, or she'll get bored. That's when the naughty stuff starts.
- ✓ 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 Akita 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

### 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
- ✓ Dry heaving or a large, tight, painful abdomen
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss, sluggish, weight gain
- ✓ Swollen lymph nodes or glands; unexplained weight loss
- ✓ General reluctance to run or play
- ✓ Stiffness or reluctance to rise/sit/use stairs
- ✓ Any abnormal shaking, trembling, or excessive involuntary tremors
- ✓ Easily startled, no reaction to unseen sounds

## 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 **Embark Health Genetic Screen** to screen for more than 150 genetic mutations that cause disease.

Each **Embark Health Genetic 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 Akita'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 <https://embarkvet.com/>

Your Akita 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:

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## Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

<b>How We' ll Keep Your</b> <i>Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years</i>	(√)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Akita-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	<input type="radio"/>	6–8 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination  Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Internal organ health evaluation Neurological assessment Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Cataracts Brachygnathism and Prognathism Renal Dysplasia Deafness
	<input type="radio"/>	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Internal organ health evaluation Neurological assessment Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts Brachygnathism and Prognathism Renal Dysplasia Deafness
	<input type="radio"/>	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Internal organ health evaluation Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Schedule spay/neuter surgery Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts Brachygnathism and Prognathism Renal Dysplasia Deafness
	<input type="radio"/>	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Internal organ health evaluation Pre-surgical diagnostics Discuss bloat, stomach tack, and microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts Brachygnathism and Prognathism Renal Dysplasia
	<input type="radio"/>	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts Brachygnathism and Prognathism Allergies Renal Dysplasia Hip dysplasia and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy  All major diseases important in the breed with diagnostic plan

## Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

<b>How We' ll Keep Your Akita Healthy</b>		(√)	<b>Age</b>	<b>Services We'll Provide</b>	<b>Akita-Specific Problems We're Looking For</b>
		<b>Adult: 18 to 39 in People</b>	<input type="radio"/>	1 years through 6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head-to-tail physical examination</li> <li>Eye disease screen</li> <li>Skin and coat exam</li> <li>Internal organ health evaluation</li> <li>Endocrine screening</li> <li>Bone and joint exam</li> <li>Neurological assessment</li> <li>Cancer screen</li> <li>Parasite prevention</li> <li>Vaccinations</li> <li>Spay/neuter surgery</li> <li>Discuss behavior and nutrition</li> </ul>
<b>Senior: 40 to 59 in People</b>	<input type="radio"/>	7 years through 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head-to-tail physical examination</li> <li>Eye disease screen</li> <li>Skin and coat exam</li> <li>Endocrine screening</li> <li>Bone and joint exam</li> <li>Neurological assessment</li> <li>Cancer screen</li> <li>Parasite prevention</li> <li>Vaccinations</li> <li>Discuss mental and physical well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), and Glaucoma</li> <li>Allergies, Pemphigus Foliaceus, Sebaceous Adenitis, and Uveodermatologic Syndrome (VKH)</li> <li>Hypothyroidism</li> <li>Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Arthritis</li> <li>Epilepsy</li> <li>Lymphoma and Osteosarcoma</li> </ul>	
<b>Senior: 40 to 59 in People</b>	<input type="radio"/>	9 years and older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head-to-tail physical examination</li> <li>Eye disease screen</li> <li>Skin and coat exam</li> <li>Endocrine screening</li> <li>Bone and joint exam</li> <li>Neurological assessment</li> <li>Cancer screen</li> <li>Parasite prevention</li> <li>Vaccinations</li> <li>Discuss mental and physical well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), and Glaucoma</li> <li>Allergies, Pemphigus Foliaceus, Sebaceous Adenitis, and Uveodermatologic Syndrome (VKH)</li> <li>Hypothyroidism</li> <li>Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Arthritis</li> <li>Epilepsy</li> <li>Lymphoma and Osteosarcoma</li> </ul>	

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.