

Your American Pit Bull Terrier

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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American Pit Bull Terriers: 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 Pits and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- An affectionate companion and family dog
- Lively, with a friendly personality
- People-oriented and eager to please
- Intelligent, friendly, and easily won over
- Compact - does well in small living quarters
- Has a short, easy-to-care-for coat

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

- Needs regular exercise and diet regulation to avoid weight gain
- Early obedience training and socialization is recommended
- Overprotective of family and territory if not socialized properly
- Aggressive toward other animals
- May need supervision around children
- Sees cats and small animals as prey unless trained otherwise

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She is friendly and can adapt to almost any living situation, as long as she is well socialized and gets daily exercise and attention.

The American Pit Bull Terrier was brought to the United States by immigrants from England, Ireland, and Scotland during the 19th century. In America, selective breeding increased their weight and enlarged their jaws, giving them a more powerful-looking head. Originally bred for bull baiting and as a farm dog, the APBT has become a popular



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General Health Information for your American Pit Bull Terrier

Dental Disease

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. And unfortunately, your American Pit Bull Terrier is more likely than other dogs to have problems with her teeth. 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 her teeth and be in danger of damaging her kidneys, liver, heart, and joints. In fact, your American Pit Bull Terrier'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.

Infections

American Pit Bull Terriers 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 the diseases we see in our area, her age, and other factors.

Obesity

Obesity can be a significant health problem in American Pit Bull Terriers. 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 Pit'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 Pit Bull 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. This is convenient for you

companion. The Pit Bull is a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 12-14 years. They can suffer from some common conditions like hip dysplasia and allergies. Early diagnosis is the key to a long and happy life so be sure to schedule routine checkups.

Your American Pit Bull Terrier'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 Pit Bull. By knowing about health concerns specific to American Pit Bull Terriers, 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 American Pit Bull Terriers 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 American Pit Bull Terriers. 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 Pit 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.

and easy for your friend. Routine blood testing prior to surgery also helps us to identify and take precautions for 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 American Pit Bull Terriers

Hip Dysplasia

You've probably heard of hip [dysplasia](#), an inherited disease that causes the hip joints to form improperly and leads to arthritis: it is common in American Pit Bull Terriers. 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. Surgery is sometimes considered in severe and life-limiting cases of hip dysplasia. Keep in mind that overweight dogs may develop arthritis years earlier than those of normal weight, causing undue pain and suffering.

Knee Problems

Sometimes your Pitbull's kneecap (patella) may slip out of place (called [patellar luxation](#)). You might notice that he runs along and suddenly picks up a back leg and skips or hops for a few strides. Then he kicks his leg out sideways to pop the kneecap back in place, and he's fine again. If the problem is mild and involves only one leg, your friend may not require much treatment beyond arthritis medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery may be needed to realign the kneecap to keep it from popping out of place.

Thyroid Problems

Pit Bulls 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, or other behavioral changes. We'll conduct a blood screening test annually to screen for the disease. Treatment is usually simple: replacement hormones given in the form of a pill.

keeps the mites in check, but some breeds, like your Pit Bull, 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 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.

Skin Infections

Your Pit bull is prone to a form of skin infection called [zinc-responsive dermatosis](#), in which he either isn't getting enough zinc in his diet or doesn't absorb it properly. Signs include red, hairless, crusting, scaling, or oozing skin around the mouth, chin, eyes, and ears or lesions on the foot pads and nose. If your dog develops this disease, we'll prescribe a carefully regulated amount of zinc in his diet.

Ichthyosis

Dry, flaky, itchy skin is a common problem for many dogs, but Pits in particular are prone to a severe flaking skin condition called [ichthyosis](#). Named for the large dry flakes that resemble fish scales, this problem usually arises very early in life, with most affected puppies born with abnormal skin. Several palliative treatment options like special shampoos and fish oils give variable levels of relief, but there is no definitive cure for this inherited disease. There is a genetic test available for many breeds that can determine whether he is clear, a carrier, or affected. This is important information if you are planning to use your friend for breeding, as it is not recommended to breed dogs who are affected or carriers; the goal is to prevent this debilitating disease in future generations.

Nerve Disease

[Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis](#), shortened to NCL, is a progressive neurologic disease found in several breeds, including your American Pit Bull Terrier. Clinical signs usually appear in younger dogs, between around one to three years of age. In the early stages, rear leg weakness and imbalance can occur. It can progress to weakness involving all four legs, and some dogs also lose vision. There is currently no effective treatment for this disease, but a genetic test is available. Dogs carrying the mutation should not be used for breeding, since it

If your Pit Bull has an inherited condition called [Hyperuricosuria](#) (HU), he will have more uric acid in his urine. Uric acid acts like fertilizer for bladder stones and sometimes kidney stone development. A DNA test is available to test for the specific mutation associated with the disease; however, once stones are present they often must be removed surgically. By testing early, we can identify whether this is a health risk for him, and start appropriate dietary therapy to prevent problems. Without a DNA test, we may recommend frequent urine analysis, x-rays or ultrasound to make sure he doesn't have these painful stones.

Cleft Lip or Palate

Your Pit Bull is more likely than other breeds to be born with a cleft lip or palate, which is an opening in the lip or the roof of the mouth. Mild cases may not require any treatment, but more serious defects require surgical repair to prevent complications. We'll check for this abnormality during his first puppy exam.

Blindness

[Progressive Retinal Atrophy](#) (PRA) is an inherited disease in which the eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. Unfortunately, American Pit Bull Terriers are a bit more likely than other dogs to have this condition. PRA is not painful, but also not curable. In dogs with the bad 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.

Parvo

[Parvo](#) is an infection caused by a virus, and it leads to deadly illness, especially in younger puppies. Vomiting, bloody diarrhea, fever and dehydration are some of the symptoms. Older dogs don't usually feel as sick, but bloody diarrhea and fever are common and affected dogs shed the virus in their stools for weeks afterwards. Several breeds, including your Pit Bull, do not develop good, strong immunity against parvovirus from vaccination; they tend to have a weaker and later response. Your friend should have an extra vaccine booster for Parvovirus about a month after the completion of the regular puppy vaccine series. His parvovirus vaccine should also be boosted yearly.

Taking Care of Your American Pit Bull Terrier 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 Pit Bulls. 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 Pit 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.
- ✓ She has low grooming needs. Brush her coat as needed, at least weekly.
- ✓ American Pit Bull Terriers 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!
- ✓ She's a smart dog with lots of energy, so keep her mind and body active, or she'll get bored. That's when the naughty stuff starts.
- ✓ She is easy to train but early obedience and socialization are required to keep her from becoming overprotective and aggressive.
- ✓ 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 American Pit Bull Terrier needs help.

Office calls





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

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
- ✓ Leg stiffness, reluctance to rise, sit, use stairs, run, jump, or “bunny hopping”
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss, sluggish, weight gain
- ✓ Dry, scaly, sometimes itchy hairless patches on face or paws
- ✓ Excessive incoordination, beyond normal puppy clumsiness
- ✓ Vomiting and bloody, watery diarrhea

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.

This one-time test is one of the best decisions you can make for your American Pit Bull'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://embarkvet.com>

Your Pit Bull 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

How We'll Keep Your American Pit Bull Terrier	Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	American Pit Bull Terrier-Specific Problems We're Looking For
		○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Cleft lip and palate Ichthyosis
		○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Neurological assessment Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis and Demodicosis Cerebellar ataxia
		○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis and Demodicosis Cerebellar ataxia
		○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Pre-surgical diagnostics Discuss microchipping, Parvovirus, and Babesiosis	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis, Demodicosis, and Zinc responsive dermatosis
		○	6 months to 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis, Demodicosis, Zinc responsive dermatosis, and Allergies Hip dysplasia and Patellar luxation All major diseases important in the breed with diagnostic plan

Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your American Pit Bull Terrier Healthy	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	American Pit Bull Terrier-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	○	1 years through 7 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition Schedule spay/neuter after 1 year	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis, Zinc responsive dermatosis, and Allergies Hyperuricosuria Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia and Patellar luxation Neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (NCL)
	○	8 years through 9 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis, Zinc responsive dermatosis, and Allergies Hyperuricosuria Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia and Patellar luxation Neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (NCL)
	○	10+ years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Ichthyosis, Zinc responsive dermatosis, and Allergies Hyperuricosuria Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia and Patellar luxation Neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (NCL)