

# Your Basenji

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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Your Basenji

## Basenjis: 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 Basenjis, also known as African Barkless Dogs, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Affectionate companion and family dog
- Highly intelligent, playful, and energetic
- Confident, steady, and fearless
- Alert, curious, and busy
- Quirky, entertaining personality
- Loving and loyal to her owners

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

- Needs a lot of activity and mental stimulation to avoid boredom vices
- Strong prey drive—will chase and grab things that run, including cats and children
- Not easily trained
- Can be independent and strong-willed
- Suspicious of strangers
- Easily bored and may find trouble

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! They might be called barkless dogs, but they're not silent! They use their voices in a distinctive yodel or baroo to communicate their feelings with you!

The Basenji is an ancient hunter originating in Africa and highly valued in Egypt. Bred to hunt reed rats, they became prized companions and were given as gifts to the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. They are fastidious about staying clean and dislike wet and cold weather. The Basenji is a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 10-12 years. Early detection of conditions Basenjis may develop is the key to a long and happy life, so be sure to schedule routine checkups.



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## Your Basenji'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 Basenji. By knowing about health concerns specific to Basenjis, 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 we've 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 Basenjis 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 Basenjis. 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 African Barkless Dog 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.

## General Health Information for your Basenji

### Dental Disease

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

Basenjis 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 Basenjis. 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 African Barkless Dog'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 Basenji 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 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 Basenjis

## Bladder or Kidney Stones

There are a few different types of stones that can form in the kidney or in the bladder, and Basenjis 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!

## Kidney Disorder

**Fanconi syndrome** is a disorder of the kidneys that allows vital blood nutrients to escape into the urine. Because these nutrients are so important, affected Basenjis can experience excessive urination and thirst, weight loss, and weakness due to abnormal electrolyte levels. Symptoms usually appear between two and six years of age. The severity and course of the disease varies from dog to dog; some pets remain stable for years while others may develop fatal kidney failure. Routine urine screening can help to diagnose Fanconi syndrome in its early stages, and prompt treatment can greatly extend both your pet's lifespan and his quality of life.

## Hip and Elbow Dysplasia

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 Basenji'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!

## Knee Problems

Sometimes your Basenji's kneecap (patella) may slip out of place. This is called **patellar luxation**. You might notice that your pet, while running, suddenly picks up a back leg or skips and hops for a few strides. He might then kick his leg out sideways to pop the kneecap back in place. These are common signs of patellar luxation. 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 luxating further.

## 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 Basenji, 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.

## Inflammatory Bowel Disease

**Inflammatory Bowel Disease** or IBD is an immune system disorder common in Basenjis in which the intestinal lining becomes overrun with immune system cells called lymphocytes and plasmacytes. The stomach and/or intestinal lining becomes thickened affecting his ability to absorb nutrients properly. Chronic vomiting or diarrhea is common, or symptoms may flare up suddenly and then improve again for a time. Stress, diet change, or intestinal parasites can make IBD worse. If your friend has diarrhea or digestive upsets that are not explained by more common reasons, diagnostic tests, which may include intestinal biopsy, will be needed. Lifelong medications and special diets are usually required to keep IBD under control.

## 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 Basenjis 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.

## Hernia

An **umbilical hernia** is a hole or defect in the body wall in the area of the umbilicus, or bellybutton. Usually it is seen as a soft bulging in the center of the belly caused by abdominal fat and





sometimes intestines protruding through the hole. Considered the most common type of hernia in dogs, it is usually inherited, and your African Barkless Dog is at greater than normal risk for this problem. In most cases, the abdominal bulge can be easily pushed back into place with gentle massage, but occasionally the intestines can become stuck in the hernia and require immediate veterinary attention. We'll check your baby for this congenital defect at his first exam and discuss treatment options at that time if needed.

### *Thyroid Problems*

Basenjis 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.

### *Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency*

The pancreas has two major functions: regulating blood sugar and helping digest food. Digestive enzymes are produced by the exocrine part of the pancreas. Basenjis are at an increased risk of having too few digestive enzymes, a disorder called [exocrine pancreatic insufficiency](#). This causes inadequate digestion and absorption of nutrients leading to weight loss; foul-smelling, greasy diarrhea; and a dry and flaky coat due to his inability to absorb dietary fats. Lifelong dietary supplementation of digestive enzymes is an effective therapy.

### *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, Basenjis 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 of concern.

- [Progressive retinal atrophy \(PRA\)](#) is an inherited disease in which the eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. Unfortunately, Basenjis 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.

- [Corneal dystrophy](#) is an inherited condition in Basenjis that causes small, white crystal deposits to form in one of the layers of the cornea, the clear outer layer at the front of the eye. There is no known effective medical treatment to remove the deposits. Usually the disease progresses slowly, doesn't hurt, and causes only minor vision obstruction, but partial or complete blindness is possible. In severe cases, surgery may be considered for deposit removal, but unfortunately, the crystals may return.
- Sometimes small strands of tissue meant to disappear soon after birth remain attached to the iris. This condition is called persistent pupillary membrane, and your Basenji is more likely to have this condition than other dogs. Fortunately, these tissue bits usually don't hurt or impede vision, but can occasionally cause secondary problems.
- [Cataracts](#) are a common cause of blindness in older Basenjis. 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.

### *Blood Disorder*

A relatively rare blood disorder called [Pelger-Huet anomaly](#) can occur in your Basenji. If he is a carrier of the disease, his infection-fighting white blood cells will look abnormal under the microscope, but will operate normally. Puppies that inherit a copy of this abnormal gene from both parents, however, usually die before or shortly after birth. For this reason, it is important to diagnose breeding dogs who are carriers of this defect so they don't pass it along to their offspring.

### *Pyruvate Kinase Deficiency*

[Pyruvate kinase deficiency](#) is a genetic disease that causes red blood cells to develop abnormally. Affected Basenjis will be anemic, causing pale gums, exercise intolerance, and liver and spleen enlargement. Sadly, there is no cure and most dogs with this disease die by four years of age. There is a DNA test available to identify the disease in young puppies or for pet parents interested in breeding.



# Taking Care of Your Basenji 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 Basenjis. 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 African Barkless Dog 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 and is known for her lack of “doggie odor.” Brush her coat as needed, at least weekly.
- ✓ Basenjis 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!
- ✓ A tall fence and leash walking are a must; Basenjis like to climb and also can’t resist chasing cats and other small animals.
- ✓ 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 Basenji 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
- ✓ General reluctance to run or play
- ✓ Dry, scaly, sometimes itchy, hairless patches on face or paws
- ✓ Any abnormal shaking, trembling, or excessive involuntary tremors
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss; sluggish, weight gain
- ✓ Greasy poops, weight loss; dry, flaking coat
- ✓ Weakness, pale gums

## 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 **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 Basenji'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.embarkvet.com>

Your Basenji 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 Basenji	Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Basenji-Specific Problems We're Looking For
		○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination  Eye disease screen  Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, umbilical hernia Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, and Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM) Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly
		○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination  Eye disease screen  Skin and coat exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Umbilical hernia Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, and Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM) Demodicosis Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly
		○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination  Eye disease screen  Skin and coat exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Umbilical hernia Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, and Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM) Demodicosis Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly
		○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination  Eye disease screen  Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Blood disorder evaluation Pre-surgical diagnostics Discuss microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Umbilical hernia Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, and Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM) Demodicosis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly
		○	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen  Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, and Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM) Demodicosis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly  All major diseases important in the breed with diagnostic plan

## Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Basenji Healthy	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Basenji-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	○	1 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 Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition Schedule spay/neuter after 1 year	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM), and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) Demodicosis Urolithiasis, Fanconi Syndrome, and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Hypothyroid and Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency (EPI) Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy Pyruvate kinase deficiency and Pelger-Huet anomaly
	○	10 years through 12 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen  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 Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM), and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) Urolithiasis, Fanconi Syndrome, and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Hypothyroid and Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency (EPI) Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy
	○	13+ years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen  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 Cataracts, Corneal Dystrophy, Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM), and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) Urolithiasis, Fanconi Syndrome, and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Hypothyroid and Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency (EPI) Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy

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.