

Your Belgian Malinois

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



Belgian Malinois: 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 Belgian Shepherds and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Highly intelligent, playful, and energetic
- Has a short, easy-to-care-for coat
- Above average intelligence and trainability when positive reinforcement training methods are used
- Brave and ready for adventure

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

- Needs a lot of activity and mental stimulation to avoid boredom vices
- Sensitive by nature, a bit slow to mature
- Can be aggressive, fearful, or snappy if not socialized properly
- Strong prey drive—will chase and grab things that run, including cats and children

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She was never bred to be a family pet. She's an admirably professional dog, but some people may find her always-on-duty nature a bit difficult to tolerate.

This is the preferred dog breed for the Israel Defense Forces, US Secret Service, and Navy SEALs. Even at play, this dog is serious. She can handle any kind of highly technical support work you ask of her and will probably show you a better way to do it. Do not allow this dog to become bored! As an adult she'll still have more energy than most puppies and will rarely miss a chance to chase a cat.



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General Health Information for your Belgian Malinois

Dental Disease

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. And unfortunately, your Belgian Malinois 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 Belgian Malinois' 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

Belgian Malinois 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 Belgian Malinois. 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 Belgian Shepherd'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 Malinois 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 and easy for your friend. Routine blood testing prior to surgery

Your Belgian Malinois' 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 Malinois. By knowing about health concerns specific to Belgian Malinois, 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 Belgian Malinois 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 Belgian Malinois. 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 Belgian Shepherd 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.

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 Belgian Malinois

Bloat

Gastric Dilatation and Volvulus, also known as GDV or Bloat, usually occurs in dogs with deep, narrow chests. This means your Malinois is more at risk than other breeds. When a dog bloats, the stomach twists on itself and fills with gas. The twisting cuts off blood supply to the stomach, and sometimes the spleen. Left untreated, the disease is quickly fatal, sometimes in as little as 30 minutes. Your dog may retch or heave (but little or nothing comes out), 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!

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, with Belgian Malinois commonly afflicted. If your friend is prone to seizures, they 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 effectiveness. 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.

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 Malinois' 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 sometimes a good option in severe and life-limiting cases. Keep in mind that overweight dogs may develop arthritis years earlier than those of normal weight, causing undue pain and suffering!

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, Belgian Malinois 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.

- **Cataracts** are a common cause of blindness in older Malinois. 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.
- Sometimes small strands of tissue that were meant to disappear soon after birth remain attached to the iris. When this happens, it's called Persistent Pupillary Membrane, and your Belgian Malinois is more likely to have this condition than other dogs. Fortunately, these tissue bits usually don't hurt or impede vision, but occasionally they can cause problems.
- **Pannus** is like a suntan on your dog's eyeball. In affected breeds, inflammatory cells infiltrate the cornea (clear part of the eye) which darkens with exposure to ultraviolet light, and may lead to complete blindness. It's considered to have a genetic component, since the condition is predominant in certain breeds, like your Malinois. We'll watch his eyes closely for early signs, and start preventive eye medications if needed. Doggie sunglasses are also an option to help reduce sun exposure.
- **Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)** is an inherited disease in which the eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. Unfortunately, Belgian Malinois 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.



Thyroid Problems

Malinois 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.

Taking Care of Your Belgian Malinois 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 Malinois. 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 Belgian Shepherd 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 could use a thorough brushing at least every couple weeks most of the year. More when she blows her coat in fall and spring.
- ✓ Belgian Malinois 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 will do anything you ask of him in exchange for your approval. Obedience classes will train you how to use her phenomenal powers.
- ✓ 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 Belgian Malinois 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
- ✓ Any abnormal shaking, trembling, or excessive involuntary tremors
- ✓ General reluctance to run or play
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss, sluggish, weight gain



For more information about genetic testing, visit
www.embarkvet.com

Your Malinois 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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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 pal'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!

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Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Belgian Malinois Healthy	Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Belgian Malinois-Specific Problems We're Looking For
		○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Cataracts and Persistent pupillary membranes (PPM)
		○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Persistent pupillary membranes (PPM)
		○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Schedule spay/neuter surgery Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Persistent pupillary membranes (PPM) Hip dysplasia
		○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Bone and joint exam Pre-surgical diagnostics Spay/neuter surgery Discuss bloat, stomach tack, and microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Persistent pupillary membranes (PPM) Hip dysplasia
		○	6 months to 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Persistent pupillary membranes (PPM) Hip dysplasia and Elbow dysplasia All major diseases important in the breed with diagnostic plan

Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Belgian Malinois	(√)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Belgian Malinois-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	<input type="radio"/>	2 years through 6 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Pannus, and Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy
	<input type="radio"/>	7 years through 9 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Pannus, and Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia and Elbow dysplasia Epilepsy
	<input type="radio"/>	10 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Pannus, and Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) Hypothyroidism 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.