

Your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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Cavalier King Charles Spaniels: 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 Charlies and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Affectionate, easygoing, and lovable
- Energetic and playful
- Good with children and other pets
- Eager to please and responsive to training
- Lively, with a friendly personality
- Intelligent and easy to train

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

- Needs frequent attention from her family
- Exhibits signs of separation anxiety if left alone too much
- Sees cats and small animals as prey unless trained otherwise
- Can be difficult to housetrain
- An indoor dog that doesn't do well in the heat
- Prone to quite a few health problems

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! She is a lover of comfort and is devoted to her family. With early socialization and consistent leadership, she is a patient and happy addition to any family.

The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel originated in England as a companion pet. The Cavalier was separated from the King Charles Spaniel, or English Toy Spaniel, in the early 1900's in an effort to return to an older variant with a longer muzzle. The Cavaliers are an active breed that enjoys chasing butterflies in the yard and is even suitable for obedience trials. When not on the move the Cavalier's favorite place is their owner's lap. The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel thrives in a home where someone is home most of the time; they require



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General Health Information for your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

Dental Disease

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

Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. 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 Charlie'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 Cavalier 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

close human contact and often become destructive when left alone more than a couple of hours. The Cavalier is an intelligent and fearless companion, but is not known to be a good watchdog even though they can alarm bark because they are often overly social with strangers. The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel is a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 9-14 years.

Your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel'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 Cavalier. By knowing about health concerns specific to Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. 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 Charlie 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.

extracted, this would be a good time. This is convenient for you 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

Heart Disease

Heart failure is a leading cause of death among Cavalier King Charles Spaniels in their golden years. Most heart disease in dogs is caused by weakening of a valve. A heart valve slowly becomes deformed so that it no longer closes tightly. Blood then leaks back around this valve and strains the heart. Pets with heart valve disease (sometimes called mitral valve disease) have a heart murmur. If your dog has a heart murmur or outward signs suggesting heart problems, we'll perform testing to determine the severity of the disease. The same tests will need to be repeated at least every year to monitor the condition. If heart valve disease is diagnosed early, we may be able to prescribe medications that could prolong his life for many years. Veterinary dental care and fatty acid supplementation can help prevent heart disease and weight control can help diminish symptoms.

Neurologic Problems

Several neurologic diseases can afflict Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. Symptoms of neurological problems can include seizures, imbalance, tremors, weakness, or excess sleeping. If you notice any of these symptoms, please seek immediate veterinary care.

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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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.

- Charlies have a higher tendency toward partial or milder seizures that may appear as odd behavior such as spacing out, snapping at the air as if biting at flies or falling over, without the rigid muscles and flailing that usually accompany full-blown seizures.

Bone and Joint Problems

A number of different musculoskeletal problems have been reported in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. 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.

- Sometimes your Cavalier'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.
- 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 Cavalier'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 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!
- [Intervertebral disc disease](#) (IVDD) is a common condition in Cavaliers. The disease is caused when the jelly-like cushion between one or more vertebrae slips or ruptures, causing the disc to press on the spinal cord. If your dog is suddenly unable or unwilling to jump up, go up stairs, is reluctant to move around, has a hunched back, cries out, or refuses to eat or go potty, he is likely in severe pain. He may even drag his back feet or be suddenly paralyzed and unable to get up or use his back legs. If you see symptoms, don't wait. Call us or an emergency clinic immediately! For less severe cases, rest and medication may resolve the problem. In many cases involving paralysis, we'll recommend surgical removal of the ruptured discs (within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms to get the best results). As with so many other diseases, weight control helps to prevent this problem. You should also use ramps or steps from puppyhood on so that your dog doesn't spend a lifetime stressing his back by jumping on and off of the furniture.

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, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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



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; they are 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!

Allergies

In humans, an allergy to pollen, mold, or dust makes people sneeze and their eyes itch. In dogs, rather than sneeze, allergies make their skin itchy. We call this skin allergy “[atopy](#)”, and Cavaliers often have it. Commonly, the feet, belly, folds of the skin, and ears are most 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. The good news is that there are many treatment options available for this condition.

- Allergies, swimming, overgrowth of hair in the ear canals, or an accumulation of earwax can all predispose your dog to ear infections, which are painful and annoying. Cavaliers are very often afflicted by allergies, which cause itching and inflammation in the ears and elsewhere. The earlier we diagnose this disease, the less discomfort and pain he will suffer. Be sure to call us if you notice him scratching or shaking his head, a foul odor from the ears, or if his ears seem painful to the touch. By monitoring for ear infections and treating them early, we also reduce the likelihood of eardrum damage that can lead to deafness. Most ear infections tend to recur until we work together to control the underlying cause.

Deafness

Heritable deafness has been noted in some Charlie 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.

Brachycephalic Syndrome

This disease, also known as [brachycephalic syndrome](#), affects dogs with a short nose, like your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. He has the same amount of tissue in his nose and throat as the longer-nosed dogs, but there's no place for it to go. As a consequence, the soft palate (the soft part at the back of the roof of the mouth), is too long and hangs down into the airway. The nostrils are often too small, and sometimes the trachea, or windpipe, is narrow and undersized. All of these things lead to a narrow and obstructed airway. Many of these dogs can barely breathe! Watch for exercise intolerance, loud breathing, coughing, bluish gums, or fainting. With his short nose, he is also more likely to develop other problems, such as flatulence from excessive air intake, pneumonia from aspirating food, or heat stroke. In severe cases, surgical correction may be recommended.

Cavaliers. 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.

- Dry eye, also known as [keratoconjunctivitis sicca](#) or KCS, is common in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. The tear glands no longer produce enough tears to keep the eye moist, which results in sore, itchy eyes and infections. Ouch! Symptoms include a thick discharge, squinting, pawing at the eye, or a dull, dry appearance of the eye. This is a painful condition; please call us immediately if you notice any of these signs. We'll conduct a tear test when we examine him. If he has this disease, we'll prescribe ointment that you'll need to apply for the rest of your dog's life.
- [Progressive Retinal Atrophy](#) (PRA) is an inherited disease in which the eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. Unfortunately, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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.

Ichthyosis

Dry, flaky, itchy skin is a common problem for many dogs, but Charlies 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.

Bladder or Kidney Stones

There are a few different types of stones that can form in the kidney or in the bladder, and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

Taking Care of Your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel 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 Cavaliers. 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 Charlie live longer, stay healthier, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine.

- ✓ Supervise your pet as you would a toddler. Keep doors closed, pick up after yourself, and block off rooms as necessary. This will keep her out of trouble and away from objects she shouldn’t put in her mouth.
- ✓ Brush her coat as needed, at least weekly to prevent mats.
- ✓ Cavalier King Charles Spaniels 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. Make sure to keep her floppy ears dry. Don’t worry—we’ll show you how!
- ✓ She is well suited to apartment life as long as she is given daily walks and frequent play sessions.
- ✓ She has a strong chase instinct, so she needs to be leash walked and a fenced yard is a must.
- ✓ She can be sensitive to temperature extremes; avoid any prolonged exposure and be very alert to the signs of heat stress.
- ✓ 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniel 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
- ✓ Coughing, especially at night or upon rising after sleeping, rapid breathing at rest
- ✓ Any abnormal shaking, trembling, or excessive involuntary tremors
- ✓ Bruises easily or bleeds a lot from a small wound
- ✓ Easily startled, no reaction to unseen sounds
- ✓ Loud breathing, tires easily at exercise



Partners in Health Care

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 CKC'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 Cavalier King Charles 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 Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Healthy		Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years			CKC Spaniel-Specific Problems We're Looking For	
(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide				
○	6–8 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Skin and coat exam Neurological assessment Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care			Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Retinal Dysplasia Brachycephalic syndrome Ichthyosis Deafness Thrombocytopenia/Macrothrombocytopenia	
○	10–12 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Skin and coat exam Neurological assessment Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home			Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Retinal dysplasia Brachycephalic syndrome Ichthyosis Deafness Thrombocytopenia/Macrothrombocytopenia	
○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Skin and coat exam Neurological assessment Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss obedience and grooming			Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Retinal dysplasia Brachycephalic syndrome Ichthyosis Deafness Thrombocytopenia/Macrothrombocytopenia	
○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Pre-surgical diagnostics Discuss microchipping			Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Retinal dysplasia and Cataracts Brachycephalic syndrome Ichthyosis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Chiari-like malformation, Syringomyelia, and Fly-biting seizures	
○	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations			Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Retinal dysplasia and Cataracts Brachycephalic syndrome Mitral valvular disease Ichthyosis and Allergies Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, and Elbow dysplasia Chiari-like malformation, Syringomyelia, Fly-biting seizures, and Epilepsy All major diseases important in the breed with diagnostic plan	

Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel		(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	CKC Spaniel-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	Adult-Mature: 18 to 39 in People Years	○	1 years through 9 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition Schedule spay/neuter after 1 year	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) Brachycephalic syndrome Mitral valvular disease Ichthyosis and Allergies Urolithiasis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Intervertebral disk disease (IVDD) Chiari-like malformation, Syringomyelia, Fly-biting seizures, Primary secretory otitis media, and Epilepsy
	Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years	○	10 years through 12 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) Brachycephalic syndrome Mitral valvular disease Ichthyosis and Allergies Urolithiasis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Intervertebral disk disease (IVDD) Chiari-like malformation, Syringomyelia, Fly-biting seizures, Primary secretory otitis media, and Epilepsy
	Golden Years: 60+ in People Years	○	13+ years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) Brachycephalic syndrome Mitral valvular disease Ichthyosis and Allergies Urolithiasis Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Intervertebral disk disease (IVDD) Chiari-like malformation, Syringomyelia, Fly-biting seizures, Primary secretory otitis media, and 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.