

Your Chow Chow

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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Your Chow Chow

Rough Coated Chow Chows: 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 Chows and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Confident and self-reliant
- Even-tempered; adaptable to a wide variety of environments
- Quiet—not much of a barker
- Formidable guard dog; highly territorial
- Docile and devoted
- Requires minimal exercise

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

- Independent and headstrong
- Doesn't respond to training quickly
- Can have an unstable temperament if not bred properly, including excessive barking, hyperactivity, or aggression
- Suspicious of and aggressive toward strangers and other dogs if not socialized properly
- Doesn't do well in the heat
- May need supervision around children

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! The Chow Chow has a cat-like nature. She is dignified, clean, and reserved with her affections. She likes to take it easy when not engaged in activity.

The Chow Chow is an ancient breed that originated in China as an all-purpose dog used in hunting, herding, pulling, and for protection. The Chow is known for its characteristic blue-black tongue, stilted gait, and extra-thick fur around the neck. In China, they are known as *Songshi Quan* or "Puffy



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Lion Dogs." The Chow Chow is a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 11-12 years. Chows are an intelligent breed, but may also be stubborn and a challenge to train. They are, however, very clean, so it's easy to housebreak a Chow.

Your Rough Coated Chow Chow'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 Chow Chow. By knowing about health concerns specific to Rough Coated Chow Chows, 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 Rough Coated Chow Chows 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 Rough Coated Chow Chows. 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 Chow 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 Rough Coated Chow Chow

Dental Disease

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

Rough Coated Chow Chows 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 Rough Coated Chow Chows. 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 Chow'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 Chow Chow 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 Rough Coated Chow Chows

Bloat

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

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, Rough Coated Chow Chows can inherit or develop a number of different eye conditions, some of which may cause blindness if not treated right away, and most of which can be extremely painful! We will evaluate his eyes at every examination to look for any signs for concern.

- **Glaucoma**, an eye condition that affects Rough Coated Chow Chows and people too, is an extremely painful disease that rapidly leads to blindness if left untreated. Symptoms include squinting, watery eyes, bluing of the cornea (the clear front part of the eye), and redness in the whites of the eyes. Pain is rarely noticed by pet owners though it is frequently there and can be severe. People who have certain types of glaucoma often report it feels like being stabbed in the eye with an ice pick! Yikes! In advanced cases, the eye may look enlarged or swollen like it's bulging. We'll perform an annual glaucoma screening to diagnose and start treatment as early as possible. Glaucoma is a medical emergency. If you see symptoms, don't wait to call us, go to an emergency clinic!
- **Entropion** is a condition in which the eyelid rolls inward, causing the eyelashes to rub against the cornea (the surface of the eyeball). This is an extremely irritating and painful condition that can ultimately lead to blindness. Entropion can occur in any dog breed, however, your Chow Chow is especially at risk for this heritable disorder. Surgical correction is usually successful if performed early.
- **Cataracts** are a common cause of blindness in older Chow Chows. 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 Rough Coated Chow Chows. KCS reduces the amount of fluid produced by the tear glands such that they are no longer able to keep the eyes moist. This results in sore, itchy eyes and infections. Symptoms of KCS include a dull, dry appearance or thick discharge from the eyes, squinting, and pawing at the eyes. KCS is a painful condition; please call us immediately if you notice any of these signs, and we'll conduct a tear test on your pet. If he has this disease, we'll prescribe ointment that you'll need to apply for the rest of your dog's life.

Bone and Joint Problems

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

- Both hips and elbows are at risk for **dysplasia**, an inherited disease that causes the joints to develop improperly and results in arthritis. Stiffness in your Chow Chow'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!
- Sometimes your Chow Chow'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.
- The cranial cruciate ligament is one of four tough bands of tissue that hold each knee together. A torn cranial cruciate ligament is a common injury in active dogs, including your Chow. Usually, surgical correction can stabilize the knee and help prevent crippling arthritis. Physical therapy and multimodal pain management are necessary for the best outcomes. Keeping him at the right weight, feeding a high-quality diet, and avoiding too much twisting of the knees (like when playing Frisbee) are key in avoiding these painful injuries.

- When Chow Chow puppies are allowed to grow too quickly, the cartilage in their joints may not attach to the bones properly. This problem is known as osteochondritis dissecans, or OCD. If this occurs, surgery may be required to fix the problem. Our recommended growth rate for Chow Chow puppies is no more than four pounds per week. To maintain this rate, don't overfeed him and don't supplement with additional calcium. Feed a large-breed puppy diet rather than an adult or regular puppy diet. And weigh your puppy every three to four weeks to make sure he's on track.
- Growing Chow Chows can suffer from a painful inflammation of the long bones in the legs called **eosinophilic panosteitis**, or pano or eo-pan for short. It usually starts at around six to ten months of age and shifts from leg to leg. We'll look for this condition upon examination; if your pal exhibits pain when the area is squeezed or palpated, we'll take X-rays to diagnose the problem. Panosteitis usually causes no permanent damage, but requires pain medication. If your dog has this condition and develops an abnormal gait to compensate for the sore leg(s), rehabilitation exercises may be required.

Neurological Disease

A genetically linked neurological condition, known as **wobbler disease** or wobbler syndrome, causes a wobbly, drunken gait in affected pets. Wobbler disease is the result of a narrowing of the vertebrae in the neck that pinches the spinal cord and associated nerves. When pinched, the nerves do not send signals to the brain as they should causing the pet to be unable to feel his feet. The first signs you will often notice with wobbler disease are unstable hind legs, stumbling, and sometimes falling. Treatment options include medications, neck braces, rehabilitation exercise programs, and surgery.

Diabetes

Diabetes mellitus is a fairly common disease in dogs. Any breed can be affected, but Chows have an above average incidence. Dogs with diabetes are unable to regulate the metabolism of sugars in their bodies and require daily insulin injections. Diabetes is a serious condition and one that is important to diagnose and treat as early as possible. Symptoms include increased eating, drinking, and urination, along with weight loss. If he shows signs, we will conduct lab tests to determine if he has this condition and discuss treatment options with you. Treatment requires a serious commitment of time and resources. Well-regulated diabetic dogs today have the same life expectancy as other canines.

Cancer

Cancer is a leading cause of death among dogs in their golden years. Your Rough Coated Chow Chow, however, is a bit more prone to certain kinds of cancer that can appear at a younger age. Many cancers are cured by surgical removal, and some types are treatable with chemotherapy, but for all types, early detection is critical! We'll do periodic blood tests and look for lumps and bumps on your pet at each exam. The healthcare chart included in this care guide lists the specific eye disorders your pet may encounter.

Autoimmune Skin Disease

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

Allergies

In humans, allergies to pollen, mold, or dust make people sneeze. In dogs, rather than sneezing, allergies make their skin itchy. We call this skin allergy "**atopy**", and Chow Chows often have it. The feet, belly, folds of the skin, and ears are most commonly affected. Symptoms typically start between the ages of one and three and can get worse every year. Licking the paws, rubbing the face, and frequent ear infections are the most common signs of allergies. The good news is that there are many treatment options available for these conditions.

Heart Disease

Some breeds, like your Chow Chow, can be born with a variety of heart defects. Most affect the structure of the heart's dividing wall or the vessels of the heart. Defects can also cause problems with heart valve function or the electrical signals that control the heartbeat. Because of the significant risk of heart disease in this breed, we'll pay special attention to his heart during each examination. Special testing will be recommended if we hear a heart murmur or if you notice any unusual symptoms such as tiring easily, coughing, a swollen belly, or fainting.

Thyroid Problems

Chow Chows 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. Rough Coated Chow Chows 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.

Taking Care of Your Rough Coated Chow Chow 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 Chow Chows. 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 Chow 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 needs a thorough brushing at least weekly most of the year. Twice a year she blows her coat and loses crazy amounts of hair; daily brushing is recommended during this time.
- ✓ Rough Coated Chow Chows 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 is well suited to apartment life as long as she is given daily walks and short play sessions.
- ✓ She can be sensitive to warm temperatures; avoid any prolonged sun 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 Rough Coated Chow Chow 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
- ✓ Increased hunger and thirst; weight loss
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss; sluggish, weight gain
- ✓ Greasy stool, weight loss, dry flaking coat
- ✓ Lumps or bumps – regardless of size

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
- ✓ General reluctance to run or play
- ✓ Tiring easily, coughing, a swollen belly, or fainting/collapse
- ✓ Leg stiffness; reluctance to rise, sit, use stairs, run, or jump; “bunny hopping”



This one-time test is one of the best decisions you can make for your Chow Chow'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 Chow Chow 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

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Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Rough Coated Chow Chow Healthy	Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years			
	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Chow Chow-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Bone and joint exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Entropion and Cataracts Ventricular septal defect Patellar luxation
	○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Bone and joint exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Entropion and Cataracts Ventricular septal defect Patellar luxation and Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD)
	○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Entropion and Cataracts Ventricular septal defect Patellar luxation and Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD)
	○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Bone and joint exam Pre-surgical diagnostics Discuss bloat, stomach tack, and microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Entropion and Cataracts Ventricular septal defect Patellar luxation and Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD)
	○	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Skin and coat exam Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Entropion and Cataracts Ventricular septal defect Allergies Exocrine pancreatic insufficiency Patellar luxation, Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD), Panosteitis, 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 Rough Coated Chow Chow Healthy		(✓)			
	Adult-Mature: 18 to 39 in People Years	○	Age	Services We'll Provide	Chow Chow-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	Senior: 40 to 59 in People Years	○	8 years through 9 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Cancer screen Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition Schedule Spay/Neuter after 1 year	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Glaucoma, and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) Allergies and Pemphigus foliaceus Exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, Diabetes, and Hypothyroidism Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Cranial cruciate tear Wobbler syndrome Gastric carcinoma
	Golden Years: 60+ in People Years	○	10+ years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Skin and coat exam Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Cancer screen Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Cataracts, Glaucoma, and Keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) Allergies and Pemphigus foliaceus Exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, Diabetes, and Hypothyroidism Patellar luxation, Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, and Cranial cruciate tear Wobbler syndrome Gastric carcinoma and Melanoma
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.					