

Your Colossal Canine

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



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Giant Mixed Breeds: They're Unique!

Your dog is special! She's your best friend and companion and a source of unconditional love. Chances are that you chose her because you like really big dogs, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Docile and devoted
- Even temper and gentle disposition
- Loyal and easygoing with the people she knows
- Protective; excellent guard dog
- Good with children

No dog is perfect, though, and you may have noticed these characteristics, too:

- Can be strong-willed and difficult to train
- Territorial with larger dogs, especially of the same sex
- Overprotective of family and territory if not socialized properly
- Aloof toward strangers
- Has a relatively short lifespan
- Can seem stubborn

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's got her own personality, and you love her for it. Her massive size is no comparison to her huge heart, and she'll show you her love as well as any lapdog!

Dogs are one of the earliest species of domesticated animals, possibly even the first! Kept as companions for protection, hunting, and sociability, the ancestors of modern-day dogs helped establish themselves in the long term as man's true best friend. Believe it or not, every breed of dog today is derived from one early species of wolf! Yes, even Chihuahuas and Great Danes came from the same wolf ancestor! Over the thousands of years that dogs have lived with humans, they have been selectively bred for many different traits, such as size, intelligence, athleticism, and



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General Health Information for your Giant Mixed-Breed

Dental Disease

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

Giant Breeds 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 Giant Breed dogs. 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 pet'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 Giant Breed 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.

even just cuteness, eventually establishing all the breeds we know and love today. The downside to selective breeding can be a genetic predisposition to certain syndromes, illness, or injuries and your Mixed Breed is at risk for inherited conditions passed down from the dam and sire. Whether your pup is purebred or mixed, he's 100% dog at heart, and considering the history of the species, that's saying a lot!

Your Mixed-Breed Dog's Health

We know that because you care so much about your dog, you want to take good care of him. That is why we have summarized the health concerns we will be discussing with you over the life of your Giant Breed. By knowing about health concerns specific to large dogs, we can tailor a preventive health plan to watch for and hopefully prevent some predictable risks.

We recommend genetic testing for all mixed-breed dogs because identifying your pal's genetic make-up is an important step you can take to ensure his future health and happiness! Just because your pet might look like a Great Dane doesn't necessarily mean his genes are a Great Dane's! And even if your pet is part pure breed, it doesn't mean he'll have the same behavioral tendencies or health problems as that breed. He may have inherited traits and predispositions from his parents or even grandparents of entirely different breeds! We want to know which breeds are included in your dog's genetic make-up so we can help you know what to expect in terms of his behavior and health.

This guide contains general health information important to all canines as well as the most important genetic predispositions for Giant Breeds. 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 pet looking and feeling his 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.



Don't worry; we'll discuss the specific problems we will be looking for when the time arrives.

Genetic Predispositions for Giant Mixed-Breeds

Suspected Disease Risks

We recommend genetic testing for all mixed-breed dogs because identifying your pal's genetic make-up is an important step you can take to ensure his future health and happiness! Just because your pet might look like a Collie doesn't necessarily mean his genes are a Collie's! And even if your pet is part pure bred, it doesn't mean he'll have the same behavioral tendencies or health risks as that breed. He may have inherited traits and predispositions from his parents or even grandparents of entirely different breeds! We want to know which breeds are included in your dog's genetic make-up so we can help you know what to expect in terms of his behavior and health.

Bloat

Gastric dilatation volvulus, also known as GDV or bloat, usually occurs in dogs with deep, narrow chests. This means your Giant Breed may be at increased risk. 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!

Cancer

Cancer is a leading cause of death among dogs in their golden years. Your Giant Mixed-Breed, however, may be 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 cancers your pet may encounter.

Heart Disease

Giant Mixed-Breed dogs are especially prone to a life-threatening heart condition known as **dilated cardiomyopathy**, or DCM, in which the heart becomes so large, thin, and weak that it can no longer effectively pump blood to the body. As this problem advances, your pet may act weak or tired, faint or collapse, breathe in a labored way, or cough. We'll conduct a yearly electrical heart screening (ECG) and/or an echocardiogram to look for abnormal heart rhythms as early as one year of age. If indicated, treatment includes medication and dietary supplementation.

Bone and Joint Problems

A number of different musculoskeletal problems have been reported in Giant Mixed-Breed dogs. 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 dog'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!
- When Giant-Breed 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 large-breed 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.
- 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 Giant Breed. 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.
- Growing Giants 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 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.

Skin Infections

Your Giant Mixed-Breed dog is prone to a form of skin infection called [lip-fold pyoderma](#), which occurs because the folds of skin along the lower jaw are usually moist. Bacteria and yeast can readily thrive here and cause a reddened, smelly area that is uncomfortable for your dog. We will examine him for this problem often (let us know if you see signs as well), and we'll recommend treatment with antibiotics as necessary. When symptoms are severe, the excess skin folds can also be surgically removed.

Thyroid Problems

Giant Mixed-Breeds 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.

Taking Care of Your Colossal Canine 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 his diet, make sure he gets plenty of exercise, regularly brush his teeth, 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 him. This is when we'll give him the necessary "check-ups" and test for diseases and conditions that are common in giant breeds. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures he will need throughout his 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 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.
- ✓ Brush her coat as needed, at least weekly.
- ✓ Brush her teeth at least three times a week and don't let her chew on bones, ice cubes, hooves, or tennis balls.
- ✓ Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don't worry—we'll show you how!
- ✓ Keep your dog's diet consistent, feed a high-quality diet appropriate for her age, and don't give her people food!
- ✓ Exercise your dog regularly, but don't overdo it at first.

What to Watch For

Give us a call if you notice any of these signs:

- ✓ Vomiting or chronic diarrhea
- ✓ Weight loss or weight gain
- ✓ Change in appetite or water consumption
- ✓ Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- ✓ Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- ✓ Limping or lameness
- ✓ Coughing or difficulty breathing; episodes of weakness
- ✓ Pot-belly appearance
- ✓ Inability or straining to urinate
- ✓ Cloudiness, redness, itching or any other abnormality involving the eyes
- ✓ Itchy skin (scratching or licking); hair loss
- ✓ Lumps, bumps, or moles
- ✓ Scratching or shaking the head; discharge in the ear
- ✓ Redness or a foul odor about the lips



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. In mixed breed dogs this screen is critically important because in most cases it is difficult to know which breeds make up your pal. In people, family history or genetic disease is often known, but in mixed breed dogs' lineage is often unknown.

In an effort to screen for as many genetically linked diseases as possible, we may recommend the **Embark Genetic Health Screen** to screen for more than 150 genetic mutations that cause disease.

Your Giant Mixed-Breed 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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Each **Embark Genetic Health 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!

For more information about genetic testing, visit
<http://www.embarkvet.com>

Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Colossal Canine Healthy	Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Mixed Breed-Specific Problems We're Looking For
		○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, hernia Skin fold pyoderma
		○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Skin fold pyoderma
		○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Skin fold pyoderma
		○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Pre-surgical diagnostics Spay/neuter surgery Discuss bloat, stomach tack, and microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Skin fold pyoderma Osteochondritis dessicans (OCD), Panosteitis, and Hip dysplasia
		○	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Bone and joint exam Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Skin fold pyoderma Osteochondritis dessicans (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 Colossal Canine Healthy	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Mixed Breed-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	○	2 years through 6 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Skin and coat exam Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Neurological assessment Cancer screen Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Skin fold pyoderma Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, Cranial cruciate tear, and Arthritis Wobbler syndrome Osteosarcoma
	○	7 years through 9 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Heart health check 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 Dilated cardiomyopathy Skin fold pyoderma Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, Cranial cruciate tear, and Arthritis Wobbler syndrome Osteosarcoma, Hemangiosarcoma, and Mast cell tumors
	○	10 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Heart health check 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 Dilated cardiomyopathy Skin fold pyoderma Hypothyroidism Hip dysplasia, Elbow dysplasia, Cranial cruciate tear, and Arthritis Wobbler syndrome Osteosarcoma, Hemangiosarcoma, and Mast cell tumors

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.