YOUR SHORT-NOSED DOG

A practical guide to breathing, heat safety & everyday care

What does “brachycephalic” mean?
It describes dogs with shortened skulls and flatter faces. French Bulldogs, English Bulldogs, Pugs, Boston Terriers, Boxers, Shih Tzus and Pekingese are common examples. Their anatomy can make breathing and cooling down more difficult.

1 | BREATHING: KNOW WHAT ISN’T NORMAL

BOAS: a common airway condition

Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS) can involve narrow nostrils, an elongated soft palate, or other airway changes that restrict airflow. Severity varies from dog to dog.

Watch for these signs

- Noisy breathing while awake or resting
- Snoring, snorting, wheezing or gagging
- Tiring quickly or avoiding activity
- Trouble sleeping comfortably
- Repeated regurgitation or vomiting

Important: Loud or labored breathing should not be dismissed as “normal for the breed.” Arrange a veterinary assessment if you notice persistent snoring, noisy breathing, exercise intolerance, or sleep disruption.

2 | HEAT & EXERCISE SAFETY

Help prevent overheating

Short-nosed dogs may have difficulty cooling themselves by panting. Heat and humidity increase the risk.

- Keep your dog in air conditioning during hot or humid weather.
- Walk during cooler morning or evening hours.
- Offer fresh water and shaded rest breaks.
- Avoid strenuous play and prolonged excitement.
- Never leave your dog in a parked vehicle.

Keep activity comfortable

Choose short, gentle walks and let your dog set the pace. Stop and rest at the first sign of heavy panting, noisy or difficult breathing, weakness, or distress. Do not force exercise or wait for your dog to “push through.”

HEATSTROKE WARNING SIGNS

Heavy or worsening panting • thick drool • vomiting or diarrhea • weakness or wobbling • confusion • collapse • blue, gray, very pale or unusually red gums

Suspect heatstroke? Move your dog to a cool area, apply cool (not ice-cold) water and airflow, and go to an emergency veterinarian immediately. Call ahead if possible. Do not delay transport.

EVERYDAY CARE & WHEN TO GET HELP

Small changes in daily care can make a meaningful difference in comfort and safety.

3 | KEEP A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Extra weight can increase the effort needed to breathe. Feed measured portions, limit treats, and ask your veterinarian to help set a healthy weight and body-condition goal.

4 | CHOOSE A HARNESS

Use a well-fitted body harness for walks rather than attaching the leash to a neck collar. Avoid pressure around the throat, and check the fit regularly.

5 | EYES & SKIN FOLDS

Prominent eyes may be more vulnerable to injury. Seek care for squinting, redness, cloudiness or discharge. Keep facial folds clean and dry; redness, odor or discharge can signal infection.

6 | TEETH & DIGESTION

Crowded teeth can increase dental-care needs. Tell your veterinarian about repeated gagging, vomiting, reflux or regurgitation. These signs deserve evaluation, not just watchful waiting.

7 | ANESTHESIA & VETERINARY PROCEDURES

Brachycephalic dogs can have a higher risk of airway complications with sedation and anesthesia. They can still receive needed procedures, but the veterinary team may recommend individualized planning, careful airway management, close monitoring, and attentive recovery observation. Always tell your veterinary team about snoring, noisy breathing, exercise intolerance, gagging, or regurgitation before a procedure.

WHEN IS IT AN EMERGENCY?

GO TO AN EMERGENCY VETERINARIAN NOW

- Struggling to breathe or severe respiratory distress
- Blue, gray or very pale gums or tongue
- Collapse, fainting or inability to stand
- Suspected heatstroke
- Breathing that does not settle promptly with rest in a cool environment

At home: Keep your dog calm and cool while arranging emergency care. Do not force food, water, or medication if your dog is struggling to breathe.

OUR TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

Keep your dog lean • Avoid heat and humidity • Use a harness • Pay attention to breathing • Schedule regular veterinary checkups

Questions about your dog’s breathing or comfort? Please talk with our veterinary team. Early recognition and appropriate treatment can improve quality of life.

Educational information only; it does not replace an examination or individualized veterinary advice.