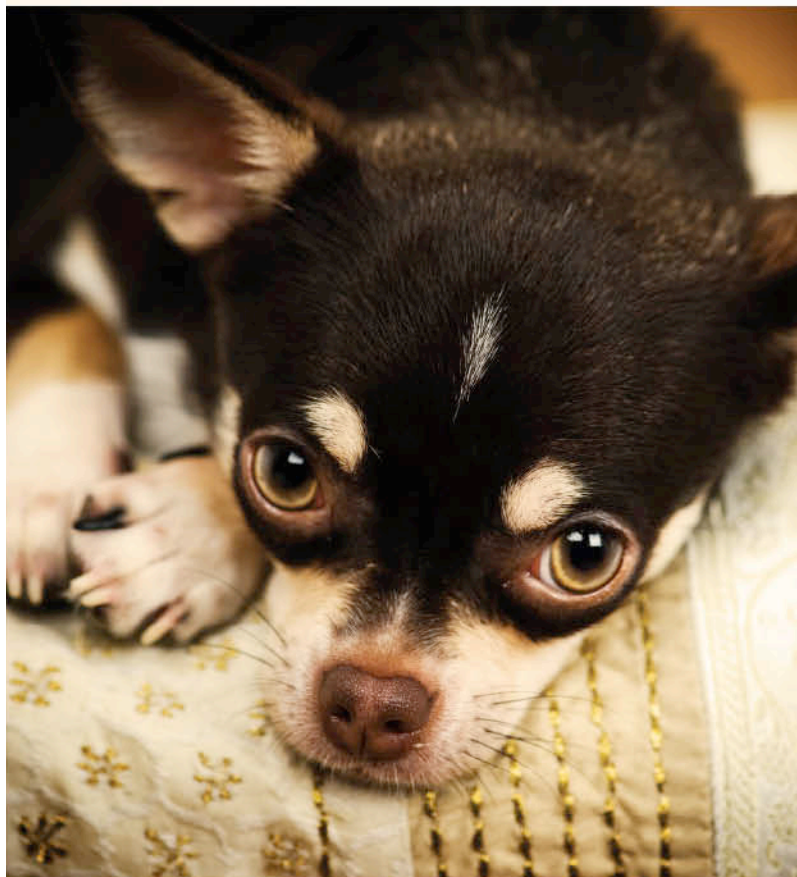


# Your Chihuahua

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



## Chihuahuas: What a Unique Breed!

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

- Confident and self-reliant
- Loyal to those he trusts
- Energetic and alert
- Quirky, entertaining personality
- Doesn't need much exercise

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

- Difficult to housebreak
- Fragile and easily injured because of his size
- Barks when suspicious strangers or dogs come around
- Can be snappy
- Has a mind of his own

Is it all worth it? Of course! He's got his own personality, and you love him for it.

## Your Chihuahua's Health

We know that because you care so much about your dog, you want to take good care of her. That's why we'll tell you about the health concerns we'll be discussing with you over the life of your Chihuahua.

Many diseases and health conditions are genetic, meaning they're related to your pet's breed. That doesn't mean your dog will have these problems; it just means that she's more at risk than other dogs.



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For more information on breed specific wellness visit:

[www.westtownvet.com/wellnessprevention-2/breed-specific-wellness/](http://www.westtownvet.com/wellnessprevention-2/breed-specific-wellness/)

Foundation site of breed specific wellness:

<http://www.upei.ca/~cidd/breeds.htm>

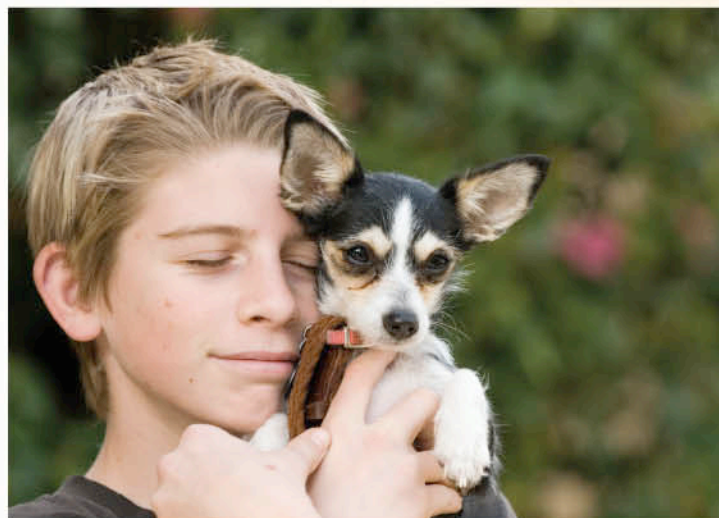
Dr. Ken's breed specific blog:

[www.breedspecificwellness.blogspot.com](http://www.breedspecificwellness.blogspot.com)

DNA/Genetic blood testing:

<http://www.facebook.com/DoggieDNA>

Your Chihuahua



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We'll describe the most common issues for Chihuahuas to give you an idea of what may come up. Of course we can't cover every possibility here, so always check with us if you notice any unusual signs or symptoms.

This guide, along with the health evaluation schedule it contains, helps us and you plan for your pet's health-care needs. At the end of this booklet, we've included a description of what you can do at home to keep your Chihuahua looking and feeling her best. You'll know what to watch for, and we'll all feel better knowing that we're taking the best possible care of your pal.

### *Cataracts*

Cataracts are a common cause of blindness in older Chihuahuas. 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 is an option.

### *Dental Disease*

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. It starts with tartar build-up on the teeth and progresses to infection of the gums and roots of the teeth. Chihuahuas are also prone to keeping their "baby teeth" (called deciduous canine teeth), which can cause the adult teeth to grow in crooked or incorrectly. Food gets trapped, which can lead to severe gum disease. Ouch!

If we don't prevent or treat dental disease, your buddy will lose teeth and be in danger of damaging her kidneys, liver, heart, and joints. In fact, your little Chihuahua'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.

### *Fluid Build-up in the Skull*

Water on the brain, or hydrocephalus, occurs when fluid builds up inside the skull and puts pressure on the brain tissue. This condition is most common in breeds with dome-shaped heads, like your Chihuahua, and is often present when the skull bones don't fuse properly. Signs include seizures, difficulty training the puppy, dulled mental function, circling, and a spastic gait. It is usually diagnosed early in life, but occasionally we diagnose it in adult dogs. We'll do testing if symptoms develop. Sometimes surgery can alleviate the problem.

### *Glaucoma*

Glaucoma, an eye condition that affects people too, is an extremely painful disease (people say it's like being stabbed in the eye with an ice pick!) that rapidly leads to blindness. Symptoms include squinting, watery eyes; cloudiness of the cornea (the clear window at the front of the eye); and redness in the whites of the eyes. In severe cases, the eye may look swollen or like it's bulging. We'll perform annual glaucoma screening for your pal to diagnose and treat it as early as possible. Glaucoma is a medical emergency. If you see symptoms, don't wait. Call us or an emergency clinic immediately!

### *Hair Loss*

Chihuahuas are prone to pattern baldness. As with balding men, the hair gradually falls out and does not grow back. The hair loss does not cause itchiness, though the skin can sometimes be dry. Usually the areas affected are the throat, chest, belly, and insides of the legs. We'll do testing to rule out treatable problems that have hair loss as a symptom, such as too little thyroid hormone. If it is true hair loss (called alopecia), we can supplement a particular hormone, which may help somewhat. There is no cure for this disease.

### *Heart Disease*

Heart failure is a leading cause of death of Chihuahuas in their golden years, and 75% of the heart disease is caused by valve deterioration. A valve that regulates blood flow slowly becomes deformed so that it no longer closes tightly. Blood then leaks back around the valve and strains the heart. Pets with heart valve disease (sometimes called mitral valve disease) have a heart murmur that can be heard with a stethoscope. If your dog has a heart murmur or physical signs that suggest heart problems, we'll perform diagnostic tests to determine the severity of the disease. We'll repeat those same tests every year or so to monitor the condition. If valve disease is diagnosed early, we may be able to prescribe medications that could prolong your pet's life for many years. Proper dental care and weight control go a long way in preventing heart disease, too.





### *Infections*

Chihuahuas are susceptible to bacterial and viral infections—the same ones that all dogs can get—such as parvovirus, rabies, and distemper. Many of these infections are preventable through vaccination, which we'll administer to your friend based on the diseases we see in our area, his age, and other factors.

### *Kidney Stones*

There are half a dozen different types of stones that can form in the kidney or in the bladder, and your Chihuahua is more likely to develop them than other breeds. We'll periodically test for the presence of kidney and bladder stones; they are painful! Symptoms of urinary tract stones include blood in the urine, straining to urinate, or inability to urinate. If she can't urinate or is straining to urinate, it is a medical emergency. Call us immediately!

### *Knee Problems*

Sometimes a Chihuahua's kneecap will 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 Chihuahua may not require much treatment beyond arthritis medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery is needed to realign the kneecap to keep it from popping out of place. Rehabilitation and special exercises can be very helpful.

### *Low Blood Sugar*

Hypoglycemia, also known as low blood sugar, is a common condition in young, small-breed dogs, including Chihuahuas. It can be caused by many conditions. The physical signs include weakness, collapse, and seizures. These signs may occur after exercise, excitement, or eating. If your little one shows any of these signs, call us!

### *Obesity*

Obesity is a significant health problem in dogs and a serious disease that may cause arthritis, some types of cancer, 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 human food and treats.

### *Parasites*

All kinds of worms and bugs can invade your Chihuahua's body, inside and out. Everything from fleas to ticks to ear mites can infest his skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into his system in any number of ways: drinking unclean water, eating or stepping on feces, 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 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 preventative medication to keep him healthy.

### *Spaying or Neutering*

One of the best things you can do for your Chihuahua is to have her spayed (called neutering in males). In males, this means we surgically remove the testicles, and in females, it means we surgically remove the uterus and ovaries. Spaying or neutering decreases the likelihood of certain types of cancers and eliminates the possibility of your pet becoming pregnant or fathering unwanted puppies. Some male Chihuahuas have a condition where a testicle stays in the abdomen instead of descending into the scrotum, and we recommend removal of both testicles in that case. Performing this surgery also gives us a chance, while your pet is under anesthesia, to evaluate and possibly address some of the diseases your Chihuahua is likely to develop.

### *Tracheal Collapse*

The trachea, or windpipe, is made up of rings of cartilage, making it look something like a vacuum cleaner's ridged hose. Just as in the hose, this structure provides flexibility and strength. In Chihuahuas, the cartilage rings are sometimes weak or have formed incorrectly. The trachea can collapse and become too narrow, which leads to coughing and difficulty breathing. Most cases of tracheal collapse are mild and are treated symptomatically with medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery is an option.

## Taking Care of Your Chihuahua 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, regularly brush her teeth, and call the veterinarian 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 Chihuahuas. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures that your dog will need throughout her life, and pet health insurance will help you cover those costs.

### *Routine Care, Diet, and Exercise*

Build his routine care into your schedule to help your Chihuahua live longer, stay healthy, and be happier during his lifetime! Watch his diet and don’t overfeed him. Overweight Chihuahuas are more prone to cancer, arthritis, heart disease, and other problems. Chihuahuas have serious problems with their teeth, so you’ll need to brush them at least three times a week!

- ✓ Keep your dog’s diet consistent and don’t give him people food.
- ✓ Feed a high-quality diet appropriate for his age.
- ✓ Exercise your dog when possible, and don’t overdo exercise.

### *What to Watch For*

Give us a call immediately if you notice any of these signs in your Chihuahua:

- ✓ Vomiting or chronic diarrhea
- ✓ Weight loss or weight gain
- ✓ Lumps, bumps, and moles
- ✓ Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- ✓ Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- ✓ Limping or lameness
- ✓ Hair loss
- ✓ 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)
- ✓ Change in appetite or water consumption
- ✓ Scratching or shaking the head, or discharge in the ear
- ✓ Hopping or skipping while running

## Partners in Health Care

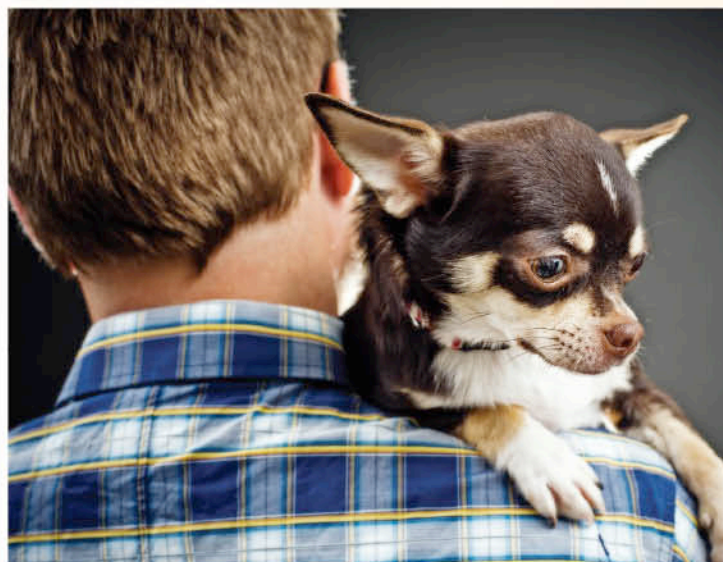
DNA testing is a rapidly advancing field with tests being developed to help diagnose conditions before they become problems for your friend. For the most up-to-date information on DNA and other screening tests available for your pal, visit [www.Genesis4Pets.com](http://www.Genesis4Pets.com).

Your Chihuahua 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 ensure that your pal has 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.

## Health Evaluation Schedule for Chihuahuas

Now that you’ve read about the health issues we’ll be monitoring, we wanted to give you an at-a-glance summary of the services we’ll provide to keep your Chihuahua happy and healthy. It may seem like your Chihuahua is prone to quite a few problems, but don’t worry; we’ll take the lead in keeping him healthy for a lifetime. We’ll review these health-care steps with you in more detail, but please feel free to ask questions or voice concerns at any time.

*Studies to determine the frequency of inheritance or disease in this breed either have not been completed or are inconclusive. 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.*



# How We'll Keep Your Chihuahua Healthy

*Puppy to Adolescent:  
Infant to 17 in People Years*

*Adult: 18 to 39  
in People Years*

*Senior: 40 to 59  
in People Years*

*Senior: 60 to 79  
in People Years*

(v)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Chihuahua-Specific Problems We're Looking For
<input type="radio"/>	6-8 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Internal parasite test and/or deworming Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Abnormal skull formation Signs of low blood sugar Retained testicle Heart murmurs Hernias Proper dental alignment Parasites
<input type="radio"/>	10-12 weeks	Brief physical examination Heartworm prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth at home	Signs of low blood sugar Proper growth rate Behavioral problems Retained baby teeth Parasites
<input type="radio"/>	14-16 weeks	Brief physical examination Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss obedience training, nail trimming, and grooming Schedule spay/neuter surgery	Signs of low blood sugar Heart murmurs Retained baby teeth Skin infections Tonsillitis Parasites
<input type="radio"/>	4-6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Gait and lameness examination Presurgical diagnostics for spay or neuter surgery	Knee problems Internal organ health prior to spay/neuter surgery Heart murmurs Retained testicle Retained baby teeth
<input type="radio"/>	1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Gait and lameness examination Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations Discuss diet, weight, and exercise	Excessive weight gain Dental disease Abnormal lumps or bumps Behavioral problems Knee problems Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	2 years through 8 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Gait and lameness examination Internal organ health evaluation Glaucoma screen Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Healthy weight Knee problems Internal organ health Kidney and bladder stones Glaucoma Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	9 years through 11 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Senior internal organ health evaluation Glaucoma screen Cancer screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Healthy weight Cataracts Arthritis Internal organ health Kidney and bladder stones Glaucoma Signs of cancer Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites
<input type="radio"/>	12 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Golden years internal organ health evaluation Glaucoma screen Cancer screen Heart health check Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Healthy weight Cataracts Arthritis Internal organ health Kidney and bladder stones Glaucoma Signs of cancer Heart disease Heartworms and other parasites

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.