

# Your Labrador Retriever

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



## Labrador Retrievers: What a Unique Breed!

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 Labrador retrievers, and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Bouncy, cheerful, loyal, and enthusiastic
- Good with kids and other pets
- Large, strong, and athletic
- Has a short, easy-to-care-for coat
- Eager to please and responsive to training

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

- Can be rambunctious and rowdy, especially as a younger dog
- Sheds quite a bit
- Needs a lot of exercise
- Is a bit "mouthy"—likes to carry and chew things
- Exhibits signs of "separation anxiety" if left alone too much

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's got her own personality, and you love her for it.

## Your Labrador Retriever's Health

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



**West Towne  
Veterinary Center**



[www.westtownevet.com](http://www.westtownevet.com) 608.828.3737

For more information on breed specific wellness visit:  
[www.westtownevet.com/wellnessprevention-2/breed-specific-wellness/](http://www.westtownevet.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 Labrador Retriever



© 2010 VetThink, Inc. [www.Genesis4Pets.com](http://www.Genesis4Pets.com)





retriever.

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 he's more at risk than other dogs. We'll describe the most common issues for Labs 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 Lab looking and feeling his 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.

### *Allergies*

Labrador retrievers can get "hay fever" or food allergies, just like humans. Symptoms may include itchy skin, recurrent ear infections, and chronic vomiting or diarrhea. The good news is that there are many treatment options available to treat allergies, from special diets to medications.

### *Bleeding Disorder*

Your Lab is prone to develop a genetically linked bleeding disorder called hemophilia. We may not know anything is wrong unless severe bleeding results during surgery or if your pet has a serious injury. We'll perform diagnostic testing for blood clotting time before we perform surgery to test for this problem.

### *Cancer*

Cancer is the most common cause of death of pets over age twelve, and your golden is especially prone to certain kinds of cancer. Early detection is critical! We'll do

periodic blood tests and look for lumps and bumps when we examine your pet. If she is overweight, we'll discuss exercise and diet because obesity is a risk factor for some types of cancer.

### *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. We'll clean your dog's teeth regularly and let you know what you can do at home to keep those pearly whites clean.

### *Ear Infections*

Labrador retrievers often get ear infections, which are painful and annoying. The earlier we catch this, the less discomfort and pain he suffers. Be sure to call us if you notice that he is scratching or shaking her head, there is a foul odor about the ears, or his ears seem painful to the touch. We'll pay special attention to his ears each time we see her. No one likes an earache!

### *Eating Weird Stuff*

Labrador retrievers eat things they're not supposed to—rocks, coins, plants, and socks, among others. Your pet carries the item in her mouth to check it out or play with it, or she thinks it's food. When swallowed, these objects often get stuck and have to be surgically removed. Some of what your dog eats is toxic and can poison her. If you notice that she is vomiting or acting lethargic, call us immediately.

### *Exercise Induced Collapse*

Some young Labrador retrievers develop this condition in which they collapse during a period of intense exercise combined with intense excitement. An otherwise fit, muscular dog loses his balance, loses control over his back legs or all legs, or falls over. At the first sign of lack of coordination or wobbliness, you must stop the exercise and let your dog rest. If he has this condition, we'll try experimental treatments that have been successful in some dogs.

### *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; 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!

### *Hip and Elbow Dysplasia*

You've probably heard of this inherited disease that causes



the hip joints to form improperly and leads to arthritis, but did you know it can also be a problem in a Labrador retriever's elbows? You may notice that she has lameness in her front legs or has difficulty getting up from lying down. We can treat the arthritis—the sooner the better—to avoid discomfort and pain. We'll take X-rays of your dog's bones to identify the disease as early as possible. Surgery is sometimes a good option in severe and life-limiting cases of hip dysplasia. Keep in mind that overweight dogs may develop arthritis two years earlier than those of normal weight, causing undue pain and suffering.

### *Infections*

In addition to ear infections, Labrador retrievers are susceptible to other 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 dog based on the diseases we see in our area, his age, and other factors. Your retriever is more likely than other breeds to get certain kinds of skin infections as well, so watch for scratching, licking, smelly skin, and lumps on his toes.

### *Joint Disease*

When Labrador retriever puppies are allowed to grow too quickly, the cartilage in their joints may not attach to the bone properly. It's best to stick to our recommended growth rate of no more than four pounds per week to avoid this condition. In addition, as she gets older, your Lab is more likely than other breeds to tear a ligament in her knee. Surgery may be required to fix either of these problems. Keeping her at the right weight, feeding a high-quality diet, and avoiding too much jumping (like playing Frisbee) are the keys to avoiding a ligament tear.

### *Muscle Disease*

Labrador retrievers may develop a disease of the muscles, called myopathy, when they're three to seven months old.

Physical signs include bunny hopping, loss of muscle tone in the limbs, a stiff gait, and carrying the head low. If we suspect that your dog has this disease, we'll do some testing to be sure. Typically, you'll need to reduce your pet's stress, and we may treat the condition with medication. Most dogs with myopathy are stabilized by twelve months of age, have a normal life span, and are suitable as house companions: no hunting or working for them!

### *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 he looks at you with those soulful eyes, you can love him to death with human food and treats.

### *Parasites*

All kinds of worms and bugs can invade your dog's body, inside and out. Everything from fleas to ticks to ear mites can infest her skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into her 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 as necessary to keep her healthy.

### *Spaying or Neutering*

One of the best things you can do for your Lab is to have him neutered (called spaying in females). 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. Performing this surgery also gives us a chance, while your pet is under anesthesia, to evaluate and possibly address some of the diseases your retriever is likely to develop. This is convenient for you and easy for your friend. Don't worry; we'll let you know what specific problems we'll look for when the time arrives.

### *Thyroid Problems*

Labrador retrievers are prone to a common condition 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, lethargy, mental dullness, sleeping excessively, fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes. We'll conduct a blood screening test annually to look for the disease. Treatment is usually simple: replacement hormones given in the form of a pill.

## Taking Care of Your Labrador Retriever 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 Labrador retrievers.

### Routine Care

Build her routine care into your schedule to help your retriever live longer, stay healthy, and be happier during her lifetime! Another very important step 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.

- ✓ 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 things she shouldn’t put in her mouth.
- ✓ Brush her teeth at least three times a week.
- ✓ Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don’t worry—we’ll show you how!

### Diet and Exercise

Watch his diet, and make sure he gets regular exercise. Overweight Labrador retrievers are more prone to cancer, hip dysplasia, ligament tears, arthritis, and other problems.

- ✓ 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 regularly, and don’t overdo exercise.
- ✓ Don’t let your dog chew on bones, ice cubes, hooves, or tennis balls.

### What to Watch For

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

- ✓ 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, discharge in the ear, or foul odor about the ears

## 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 Labrador retriever 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 Labrador Retrievers

Now that you’ve read about the health issues we’ll be monitoring, we wanted to give you an at-a-glance summary of what services we’ll provide to keep your Labrador happy and healthy. It may seem like your pet is prone to quite a few problems, but don’t worry; we’ll take the lead in keeping her 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 Labrador Retriever 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: 40 to 59  
in People Years*

	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Age	Services We'll Provide	Labrador Retriever-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	<input type="radio"/>	7-10 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Internal parasite test and/or deworming Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Heart murmurs Hernias Proper dental alignment Parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	10-13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Heartworm prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Proper growth rate Allergies and ear infections Muscle disease Behavioral problems Parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	13-16 weeks	Brief physical examination Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss obedience training, nail trimming, and grooming Schedule spay/neuter surgery	Allergies and ear infections Muscle disease Adult teeth coming in properly Skin infections Tonsillitis Parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	5-7 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Presurgical diagnostics for spay or neuter surgery Hip and elbow evaluation Bleeding clotting time	Internal organ health prior to spay/neuter surgery Muscle or joint disease Hip and elbow dysplasia Hemophilia
	<input type="radio"/>	1-1 1/2 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Heartworm test Internal parasite check Vaccinations Discuss diet, weight, and exercise	Excessive weight gain Behavioral problems Allergies and ear infections Skin infections Joint disease Hip and elbow dysplasia Heartworm and other parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	2 years through 5 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Internal organ health evaluation Thyroid testing Glaucoma screening Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Allergies and ear infections Skin infections Healthy weight Hip and elbow dysplasia Internal organ health and function Thyroid function Glaucoma Heartworms and other parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	6 years through 7 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Hip and elbow evaluation Senior internal organ health evaluation Cancer screen Thyroid testing Heart health check Glaucoma screening Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Allergies and ear infections Skin infections Healthy weight Arthritis Hip and elbow dysplasia Internal organ health and function Signs of cancer Thyroid function Heart disease Glaucoma Heartworms and other parasites
	<input type="radio"/>	8 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Golden years internal organ health evaluation Cancer screen Thyroid testing Heart health check Glaucoma screening Internal parasite check Heartworm test Vaccinations	Dental disease Allergies and ear infections Skin infections Healthy weight Arthritis Internal organ health and function Signs of cancer Thyroid function Arthritis Heart disease Glaucoma 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.