

LOOKING AFTER YOUR FRENCHIES SPINE

Like all pure bred dogs French Bulldogs have genetic conditions that may affect the health of your dog. Other than the obvious problems associated with heat, heat stress and that beautiful flat face we all love, the less obvious problem facing most Frenchies, and one many pet owners may not know exists is abnormalities in the spine. The very thing that attracts us to the French Bulldog-flat face, chunky body and lots of "bone"-is what most likely causes spinal abnormalities and problems. Frenchies are basically "miniature mastiffs" caused by chondrodysplasia or dwarfism. Dwarfism may cause the vertebrae to misshapen, known as hemivertebrae or have faulty cushioning by the discs between the bones. Hemivertebrae may go undetected throughout your dogs life, however they can also cause very serious and life-threatening complications such as paralysis.

Hemivertebrae can also lead to premature degeneration of the intervertebral discs. Intervertebral discs are small sacs of fluid that sit between each vertebra and act as shock absorbers. Degeneration of the discs can cause the discs to harden and rupture or protrude into the spinal cord, causing pain and/or paralysis. Symptoms include a protruding or stiff neck, lameness of front and/or rear legs, constipation and loss of bladder control. Treatment ranges from anti-inflammatory drugs to very expensive surgery.

Breed surveys in USA indicate that around 95% of French Bulldogs have some kind of spinal abnormality so it would be safe to assume that your Frenchie is prone to spinal health issues.

what can i do ?

Lets face it—Frenchies are NOT the elite athlete of the dog world. They are not designed or bred for same reasons a German Shepherd or a Border Collie nor should they be expected to perform in the same manner. (not that a Frenchie would EVER stoop so low as to perform tasks a working dog does!) However, no one told the Frenchie he wasn't allowed to try all those things. Because of this the Frenchie has NO fear of anything, anyone or any situation. A Frenchie would skydive to get to a certain place quicker, if he could! A Frenchie would go rock-climbing, fall off a few times, whilst trying to get to that cat, if you let him! And that is the first rule of looking after your Frenchie's spine. LIMIT ACTIVITIES KNOWN TO CAUSE PROBLEMS.

1. Do not let your Frenchie use stairs as a race track, jump off beds, couches or retaining walls or other forced jumping exercises, especially while young, ie up to the age of 18 months.
2. Limit "rough-house" play, especially with visitors and children.
3. Keep your Frenchie fit with short WALKS, not uncontrolled sprinting. Keeping fit will help the muscles supporting the spine to do their job. Exercise that includes lots of twisting and turning, such as prolonged Frisbee or ball chasing may increase the risk of injury.
4. Keep your Frenchie's weight under control. Fatty Arbuckle Frenchies put extra stresses on their spine that it frankly can do without.
5. Limit "tug-o-war" games. If you watch two dogs playing tug-o-war over a prizes possession someone always gives in, it's the rules. When humans and dogs play tug-o-war no one wants to give in, which can lead to spinal injuries. This is especially important to keep and eye on when visitors play with your dogs and don't know the "rules".
6. Seriously consider changing over to a harness rather than a collar or check chain. The collar or check chain may place undue stresses on the spine especially in the neck region, whereas the harness spreads the pressure out over a larger area.
7. Limit unsupervised, uncontrolled and prolonged off-the-lead play

when playing with other dogs.

8. Consider supplementing your Frenchie's diet with fish rich in omega 3 fatty acids such as sardines and tuna. Fatty acids assist in preventing inflammation and degeneration and are powerful anti-inflammatory agents. Two or three times a week as part of their meal.

9. Always support your Frenchie's spine when picking him up and carrying him. And teach children the correct way to pick him up. If your Frenchie is showing any signs of lameness, head tilting or yelping when you pick him up see your vet. It would be advisable to take him to a vet who is used to treating Frenchies and knows the fundamentals of Frenchie spines. And let your breeder know!