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Common Sheltie Health Problems

Shelties are basically a healthy dog breed, so don't let this article about health problems scare you. These are just potential illnesses to look out for.

One of the most important things you can do for your Sheltie's health is prevent him from becoming overweight. Some experts warn that commercial dog foods suggest larger portions than are actually needed, and this alone can make your dog fat, putting extra strain on his heart, joints and bones.

If you can't easily feel your Sheltie's ribs at the sides then he is likely overweight, so immediately cut down on his food and ensure he gets more vigorous exercise - at least 30 minutes brisk walking per day. A healthy Shetland Sheepdog that receives the right diet and exercise regime will usually live for 12-15 years.

Healthy Breeding Practices

If you bought your Shetland Sheepdog from a professional breeder, his parents will have been genetically tested to avoid passing on any hereditary health problems. Responsible breeders also get their Sheltie puppies vet checked before selling them, so that any foreseeable abnormalities can be identified. Buying a Sheltie from a reputable breeder gives you the best assurance of having a healthy dog for life.

De-sexing Sheltie can also affect what diseases they will be prone to in later life. Read these articles on [spaying](#) and [neutering](#) for more information.



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Potential Health Problems in Shetland Sheepdogs

Shelties suffer few health problems

Shelties are generally healthy, especially when they have been bred with care. However there are some conditions which affect herding breeds more commonly, such as Sheltie skin problems, knee and hip abnormalities, and eye problems. A well-bred Sheltie is unlikely to suffer from any health problems in the following list, but you should be aware of them in any event to help with early diagnosis.

Patellar Luxation

This is more common in small and toy breeds and is where the knee cap floats out of position, causing pain and difficulty straightening the leg. If your Sheltie has patellar luxation, he will limp and hold his hind leg up. This may only last for 10 minutes before he returns to normal, but it will be a recurring problem. It most often affects dogs in their middle years, and can be caused by an injury or a genetic defect. Ongoing treatment involves massaging the affected knee, but in chronic or severe cases, he will need surgery with a 30-60 day recovery period.

Hip Dysplasia

This is a large breed health problem - but also appears in smaller purebreds like Shetland Sheepdogs as a genetic abnormality. Hip dysplasia is caused by a subluxation in the hip joint, which causes extra wear and tear of the joint, leading to painful arthritis. It usually shows up in middle age and you'll see your Sheltie limping on his hind leg (or hopping like



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a rabbit while running) and hesitating when climbing stairs because of the pain it causes. A vet can diagnose hip dysplasia with a physical exam and x-rays. You then have two options: medical management or surgery. The former means maintaining your dogs healthy weight, giving him low-impact exercise like slow jogging and swimming, a warm sleeping area, and massage therapy. If you can afford it, there are many types of surgical treatment available depending on the age of your dog and the severity of the hip dysplasia.

Dermatomyositis

This is a Sheltie skin problem that affects young herding breed dogs and is more commonly known as Collie Nose. It is genetic but can be aggravated by trauma and UV light. If you see your Sheltie has any redness, scaling, crusting or hair loss on the face, take him to the vet. The lesions can appear as early as 7 weeks and in some cases treated with blank ink tattooed on the affected areas. Other treatments take the form of medication and a diet rich with Vitamin E and fatty acids. In extreme cases, the lesions can become cancerous and the condition fatal.

Scleral Ectasia

Also known as Collie Eye or Sheltie Eye Syndrome, this is an inherited health problem which prevents the eyes from developing properly in the womb. This causes impaired vision due to a detached retina, optic nerve abnormalities, or loss of retinal cells. It's thought to affect 90% of modern American Collies to some degree. Professional breeders eye-check all their Sheltie puppies and notify the new owners if any abnormality is found. Selective breeding means they don't breed dogs with Sheltie Eye which reduces the incidence of this disease, for which there is no treatment.



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Von Willebrande's Disease

This is an inherited bleeding disorder which prevents the blood from clotting normally. It's like hemophilia in humans. Von Willebrande's Disease is more common in a number of dog breeds including Shetland Sheepdogs, which reveals a genetic basis. The symptoms include excessive bleeding after surgery, nosebleeds, bleeding gums, bloody stool (caused by stomach or intestinal bleeding) and even blood in the urine. Shelties with this health problem can bleed to death after surgery or injury. There is no cure but treatment involves blood transfusions or potential drugs to help clotting.

Final Thoughts

Take care of your Sheltie's health

As you can see, you can probably eliminate many of these common Sheltie health problems if you already have a healthy adult dog from a reputable breeder.

Hip and eye checks should have been performed on your young puppy and if you've had your Sheltie neutered or spayed, you can eliminate Von Willebrande's Disease. Similarly, any serious Sheltie skin problems should show up when they are a young puppy.

Of course, like all dogs, Shetland Sheepdogs can still develop various cancers with old age and this is a good reason to take your Sheltie for an annual vet check up. Early diagnosis can make all the difference and save your Sheltie's life.