



Health and Heredity

Things You Should Know About English Springer Spaniels

The health and well being of your dog will be among your major concerns as a new or prospective owner of an English Springer Spaniel. Taking the time to learn all you can about the health of your Springer is an important step toward a long, rewarding and healthy relationship.

Reputable breeders are genuinely concerned about the well being of the puppies and dogs they produce. They are an excellent source of information on the care and upbringing of your dog.

Veterinary care begins as soon as you acquire your English Springer Spaniel. In fact, your breeder will recommend that you take your new puppy or dog to your veterinarian for a general health check within 48 hours of purchase. With your veterinarian's guidance, you will design a life-long health care program for your dog. Vaccinations will protect from infectious diseases. Internal and external parasites will be prevented and controlled. Neutering at an early age will prevent unwanted pregnancies and protect both genders against tumors and diseases of the reproductive tract. Proper nutrition will ensure healthy development and continued good health throughout your pet's life. Timely examinations will detect medical problems early, so that they may be efficiently treated.

You should also have a basic understanding of the hereditary and breed-predisposed diseases of English Springer Spaniels. All living things can carry defective genes, and all breeds of dogs have diseases and genetic conditions that can be inherited. While most English Springer Spaniels lead healthy, happy lives and retain their vigor into old age, genetic-based disorders are not uncommon.

Most hereditary disorders are not life-threatening and can be managed. However, some can cause pain and suffering to the dog, and expense and emotional distress to the owner. Even the best breeding program and the soundest of breeding stock can produce dogs with hereditary disorders. If you purchase your puppy from a responsible breeder and are knowledgeable about hereditary and breed-predisposed diseases, you will minimize the risk of health and genetic challenges.

What follows is a summary of the major hereditary disorders that can affect English Springer Spaniels.

Canine Hip Dysplasia: Hip dysplasia is a developmental abnormality of the hip joints caused by laxity within the joint. Changes in bone size, shape and structure occur as the hips attempt to compensate for abnormal stresses on the joints. Dogs with hip dysplasia may exhibit lameness at some time in their lives. By the time affected dogs are two years of age, hip dysplasia is detectable by x-raying the hips.

Young dogs (3 to 12 months of age) with hip dysplasia may be afflicted with acute inflammatory joint pain. Spontaneous temporary improvement usually occurs between 6 and 12 months. Older dogs (1.5 to 10 years of age) with hip dysplasia may have a slow onset of painful arthritis.

Treatment for young dogs is often unnecessary. For the older dog, medications can be used to reduce the arthritic pain. Surgical procedures are also available to limit pain and reconstruct the hip joint.

Your puppy's chances of developing hip dysplasia are minimized if both parents have normal hips. Ask for documentation to affirm that the sire and dam have had hip x-rays that have been appropriately evaluated. Accepted methods of evaluation are certification of normal hips by the



Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA), which is indicated on your dog's official American Kennel Club pedigree after the registered names of his/her predecessors. Hip evaluations by board-certified veterinary radiologists also provide acceptable evidence of conscientious efforts by the breeder.

Hereditary Eye Disorders: The eyes of English Springer Spaniels are susceptible to a number of genetic-based disorders, some of which are present at birth and others that may develop at various times throughout life.

Retinal Dysplasia is a developmental malformation of the retina. Affected puppies are born with the disorder. Most cases are mild; small folds and areas of retinal degeneration occur on the surface of the retina with no detectable loss in vision. These abnormalities are diagnosed by certified veterinary ophthalmologists when puppies are 7 to 12 weeks old. Retinal Dysplasia should not affect a dog's ability to function as a pet; however, affected Springers should not be bred.

Eyelid defects occasionally occur. **Entropion** is an inward folding of the lower eyelid that results in chronic irritation of the surface of the eye. It is usually observed within the first year of life. Entropion is treated through surgery.

Progressive Retinal Atrophy (or P.R.A.) is a degeneration of the layers of the retina that are responsible for vision. The disease is progressive, eventually resulting in blindness. The onset in Springers is variable, but usually occurs between 2 and 6 years of age. The disorder is still considered rare; however, its incidence has increased in recent years. There is no pain or discomfort for the dog but, unfortunately, there is no treatment.

Responsible breeders pay close attention to the eyes of their breeding stock throughout the dogs' lives, monitoring puppies and adults for the development of hereditary eye disorders. Annual examination of the eyes by a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists is recommended for all breeding stock. Ask your dog's breeder for proof that an ACVO examination has been conducted on the sire and dam of your puppy within the last year, and ask for proof that the puppy's eyes have been examined. Eyes that are normal -- free from hereditary disorders -- may be certified annually by the Canine Eye Registry Foundation (C.E.R.F.). If the puppy's parents are normal, the puppy's chances of developing eye disorders are significantly reduced.

Aggressive or Timid Temperament: Temperament and behavior problems happen in all breeds of dogs. Behavior is influenced by many factors, not only genetics but also training, family interactions, and general health. A puppy should be curious and playful, without resisting being held. He should not be aggressive or overly timid. Make every effort to ensure that your puppy comes from breeding stock with good, solid temperaments. Meet both parents and related dogs, if possible, and spend enough time with them to be comfortable with their personalities. Ask your breeder if he/she is aware of any temperament problems in your puppy's pedigree. As your puppy grows, nurture him with proper training. Neuter your puppy to minimize the effect that sex hormones have on undesirable behavior. If your puppy or dog exhibits signs of behavioral problems, notify the breeder immediately and seek the help of a qualified professional.

Seizure Disorders: Hereditary seizures are relatively rare in English Springer Spaniels. A familial pattern to the disorder exists in many pedigree lines, and some cases of seizures in English Springers are not controlled with treatment. Seizures usually begin before the age of five years. In many cases,



seizures can be controlled with medication. You should ask your puppy's breeder for full and complete disclosure of any seizure disorders within your puppy's pedigree.

Skin Disorders: Typical signs of skin disease include scaliness, greasiness, itching, pyoderma (infection), and occasional hair loss. There are genetic as well as other factors involved in the development of skin diseases.

Seborrhea may be local, or may occur over large parts of the body. It usually results in scaly, thickened, itchy skin with a greasy feel and an associated odor. Secondary skin infections are not unusual. Treatment may include medicated baths, topical medications, and antibiotics.

Allergies occur in all breeds of dogs. Canine allergies usually cause symptoms in the skin. The primary symptom is itching, but seborrhea, skin infections and hair loss are also common. Inhaled pollens or house dust, certain types of food, flea bites and other materials can trigger allergic reactions in the skin. Symptoms may be seasonal. While there is no cure for allergies, treatment may involve eliminating contact with the offending allergen (a diet change, for example, if the allergy is to a food substance), treating to relieve itching and other symptoms, and allergy testing and injections.

Ear Infections are common in English Springer Spaniels due to their pendulous ear flap, which decreases air circulation within the ear canal. The resulting environment contributes to bacterial and yeast infections. Most can be prevented with an ear care program that keeps the ears clean and dry. There are several very good ear care products available from your veterinarian. All Springers should get regular ear care. Acute and chronic infections should be treated by your veterinarian.

Phosphofructokinase (PFK) Deficiency: PFK is an enzyme vital to the ability of tissues to use sugar for energy. Some Springers have been recognized to have an inherited deficiency of this enzyme. Some dogs exhibit mild clinical signs that go unrecognized for years, while others can exhibit episodes of severe illness, including hyperventilation, muscle wasting, and fever. Testing is done by measuring the PFK enzyme through a blood sample.