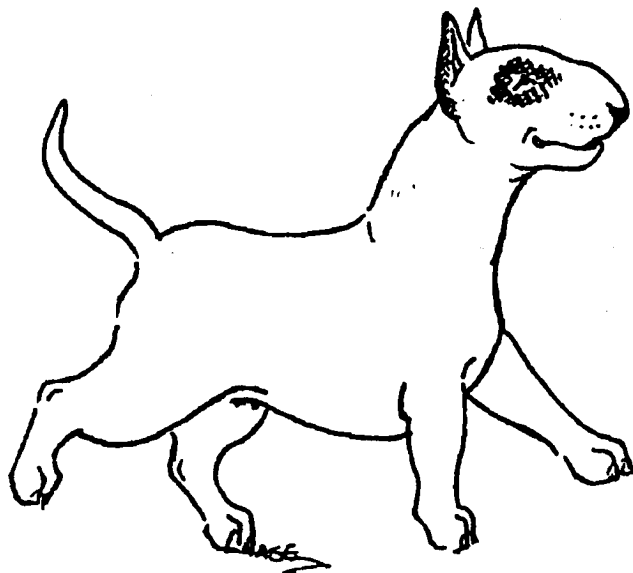


# **THE HEALTHY BULL TERRIER**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE OWNER**



Welcome to the ranks of Bull Terrier owners! You now have in your care a unique and wonderful breed of dog. May you share many years of love and companionship!

It is hoped that the information in this brochure will help you to keep your dog as healthy as possible. Included is a brief description of some traits and health problems which sometimes occur in Bull terriers and are not always quickly recognized by veterinarians unfamiliar with the breed.

## **RECORD KEEPING**

First, it makes good sense to set up a file folder just for your Bull Terrier's records. This folder is primarily for health records, but if you keep his/her AKC registration and pedigree here also, then all the records will be in one place and easy to find when needed. If you ever breed your dog, you will also need to keep careful breeding records.

## **PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION**

You should also place several sharp color photos of your dog in his folder. Adult photos will be most useful to have in case your dog is ever lost or stolen. Of course, the best identification is a skin tattoo usually done inside your dog's right thigh. You should contact a tattoo registry, such as the National Dog Registry or Tattoo-A-Pet, and arrange to have your dog tattooed. The number tattooed on your dog will be assigned by the tattoo registry. All Bull Terriers should be tattooed and registered. Ask your veterinarian to do it when your dog is spayed or neutered. Or take advantage of tattoo clinics often offered by regional Bull Terrier clubs or by your local all-breed dog club. There are also other means of identification such as coded microchips which are implanted under your dog's skin. However, at this time, many veterinary clinics, dog pounds and humane shelters do not have the scanners necessary to read these chips. Anyone should be able to see a tattoo!

## **ONE OF YOUR DOG'S BEST FRIENDS: HIS VETERINARIAN**

Try to find a veterinarian who likes Bull Terriers! He or she may never have seen one in the flesh, but you can tell whether or not the vet likes your dog! A good veterinarian is treasured by all responsible dog owners. It is well worth asking other dog people where they take their animals and making an effort to find the best animal care in your part of the world. Know where 24 hour emergency care is available and write the phone number on the front of your folder. You may never have a medical emergency at 2:00 a.m. or on Christmas day, but one

never knows, and it's best to be prepared.

Whenever you take your Bull Terrier to the veterinarian, you'll receive a computer printout which tells you exactly which vaccines your dog received or what tests and procedures were done. File all these receipts in the health folder for they form your dog's medical history. If you move either out of state or within your own state and have to find another veterinarian, you will have a complete record for his new doctor.

## **FEEDING**

There is a great deal of information available on dog nutrition. The simplest way to feed your dog well is to find a quality dry dog food which your dog seems to enjoy, and stick with that brand. Cheap dog food is no bargain! Without sufficient quantities of all required nutrients, your Bull Terrier may never grow to his/her full potential and may develop various ailments associated with poor nutrition. For example, the expense involved in trying to clear up skin and coat problems related to lack of certain fats and fatty acids in the diet quickly uses up the dollars saved by purchasing poor quality food.

Some Bull Terrier owners prefer to feed a natural diet which they concoct themselves. If this is carefully done, the results are excellent. But the owner has to have the time and dedication to do it right!

As a rule, Bull Terriers are good eaters. In fact, some are gluttons! Try not to let your dog become too heavy. If you are unfortunate enough to have a picky eater, first make sure that there is no medical reason for his/her disinterest in food. For instance, tooth problems may make a dog reluctant to eat hard food such as kibble. If there is no medical explanation, your Bully is probably holding out for whatever his human family is having for dinner! You simply have to be more stubborn than he is. Keep giving him his quality dog food, and hopefully, he'll soon get the message.

Keep plenty of fresh water available for your dog at all times.

## **TOYS**

There are few, if any, commercially made dog toys which are Bull Terrier proof. Hard rubber balls and similar toys are fine for you to toss for your dog to chase and retrieve. But when the game is over, take the toy away and put it where it's out of reach. If allowed to chew on rubber or plastic toys, your Bull Terrier will eventually gnaw off chunks and swallow them with potentially serious results. **NEVER GIVE A BULL TERRIER RAWHIDE!** They chew the rawhide until it's a slimy mess and then swallow it or try to swallow it. Bull Terriers have

choked to death on chew toys made of rawhide. Large "Nylabones" are good for chewing.

Please copy the following pages 3 through 7 and ask your veterinarian to place them in your dog's hospital file.

## HEALTH PROBLEMS IN BULL TERRIERS

Of course, Bull Terriers are subject to the same ailments and health problems as are other breeds of dogs. However, there are a few health problems which seem to occur more frequently in Bull Terriers or are almost unique to Bull Terriers.

**Gastro-Intestinal Blockage:** Bull Terriers, both as puppies and as adults, will swallow just about anything. Being rather stoic dogs, they may not appear very ill for a few days. But a depressed, lethargic, vomiting BT very likely has foreign objects in its gut. Sadly, many bull Terriers are lost because surgical intervention comes too late. Chunks of blanket, socks, underwear, various forms of plastic (particularly plastic toys), rubber, metal screening, and stones are a few of the items which have been removed from BT's. Delay can be fatal, so get your dog to your vet fast!

**Kidney Disease:** For many years it has been recognized that the Bull Terrier breed has a tendency to develop kidney problems, sometimes at a very early age. In some lines, the kidneys are very small and undeveloped. In others, glomerular nephritis (malfunction of tiny filters in the kidney) causes kidney failure before age three. Sometimes affected dogs make it to age 6-8 before dying from renal failure. In an attempt to try to decrease the incidence of kidney disease in the breed or to get treatment for animals in early stages of disease, it is recommended that a simple urine test called the urine protein/urine creatinine ratio be done annually - particularly on all breeding stock - beginning at about 18 months to 2 years of age. Breeders are asked not to breed animals with an abnormal UP/UC ratio. An abnormal ratio indicates too much protein in the urine. Such dogs are more likely to develop kidney disease themselves or to produce puppies with kidney problems.

**Acrodermatitis** (an immune problem associated with Zinc deficiency): This appears to be peculiar to the Bull Terrier breed. The disorder is recognizable in young puppies who are sometimes referred

to as "Zinkies". Some die shortly after birth because they are too lethargic to nurse. Others do fairly well until weaning. When they are no longer receiving antibodies from their mothers, they tend to develop skin lesions, particularly between the toes and on the muzzle. Some also have difficulty eating solid foods because the roof of the mouth is domed and has deeper than normal ridges. The food gets stuck, so puppies have to be hand fed a finely ground, gruel-type food. Their growth rate slows so that they become runty looking compared to their litter mates. In some pups there may be what seem to be neurologic peculiarities such as abnormal gait (hindquarters particularly) or inability to wag the tail. Nasty, rage-like temperaments may be seen in these puppies. Changes in coat color occur, with black coat or black patches tending to turn brownish. If not put down, these puppies usually succumb to infection. Affected pups are thought to have inherited a pair of recessive genes for this trait. This means that both parents carry the gene.

**Skin Diseases:** Some Bull Terriers, particularly white Bull Terriers, may suffer from severe skin problems. Possibly there is a connection between faults with the immune system and this severe dermatitis. Some dogs respond well to dietary changes to more natural-type foods with few or no chemical additives. Others may require long-term treatment with antibiotics and/or steroids.

**Neurological/Behavioral Peculiarities:** Some Bull Terriers chase their tails. In the mild form, this seems to be related to boredom or to stress of some kind. Some spin around in circles a few times when they are excited. Usually this is not a serious problem and can be remedied by removing the cause of the boredom and stress.

**Spinning:** A much more serious form of tail chasing is called spinning. This usually begins at about 6 months of age. The dog is obsessed by its tail and may circle for hours. It loses interest in food and water. All attempts to get the dog to stop this behavior fail. Sometimes the dog yelps while spinning and may even attempt to bite its interfering owner. In the past, most of these spinners were eventually put down. Even amputating the tail does not help! Over the past few years, a research project at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine suggests that spinning is form of seizure. Most spinning dogs respond to treatment with phenobarbital either alone or in conjunction with other medications. Some of the less severe cases do well on anti-obsessive drugs such as Anafranil or Prozac. It is interesting that treatment of spinning Bull Terriers has been more

successful in females than males.

**Rage:** Incidents of unexplained aggression toward human members of its own family by a dog which usually behaves normally may signify rage. A Bull Terrier with rage is an extremely frightening and dangerous dog. The episodes are usually unpredictable. Some owners claim that the dog gets a glazed look in its eyes before a "spell". Rage is presently considered to be another seizure-type disorder. Some of the severe spinners develop rage-like symptoms as the spinning becomes worse. Prognosis is poor.

It is important not to confuse dominance aggression with rage. Whereas dominance aggression is a behavioral problem which can often be overcome by correct training and proper handling, rage is apparently a neurological disfunction which does not seem to respond to training.

**Epilepsy:** A few Bull Terriers develop grand mal type epileptic seizures. If a dog has the form of epilepsy which seems to be inherited, seizures usually begin between the ages of 6 to 18 months. Although the seizures may be controlled somewhat by medication, the prognosis is not good. Affected Bull Terriers seem to survive only a year or two after onset of the disease. Also, prolonged dosage with the drug phenobarbital may cause severe liver damage which is fatal.

**Heart Disease:** Some bull Terriers have heart problems which may be hereditary. There are various kinds of heart murmurs caused by different structural problems in the heart. Some are more serious than others and are roughly graded from grade 1 to grade 6. The veterinarian may detect a heart murmur in a puppy. Often, puppies outgrow minor murmurs such as a grade 1. However, if the murmur is more serious or if a minor murmur becomes worse, the veterinarian may recommend further diagnostic tests such as cardiac ultrasound. Defects in heart structure and function are potentially life threatening, although some BT's live with their heart murmurs for many years. Needless to say, dogs with heart defects should not be bred.

**Deafness:** Hereditary deafness in Bull Terriers may have entered the breed from crosses of the 19th century dogs with the now extinct White English Terrier. Or years ago there may have been crosses with Dalmatians which today seem to have the highest incidence of hereditary deafness. It is not yet clear exactly how deafness is inherited. It was once thought to be caused by a simple recessive gene, but more likely there are several pairs of genes involved, some

of which may be dominant genes.

In any event, all Bull Terrier puppies should be tested for deafness by the BAER test. A veterinarian or your Bull Terrier club should be able to help you find the nearest BAER testing facility (your closest veterinary school or clinics held by the BTCA or your regional club). Each ear is tested separately. Most BT's have normal hearing in both ears. Some whites are deaf in both ears (bilaterally deaf) while some whites AND COLOREDS are deaf in one ear (unilaterally deaf). Until recently, it was not understood that colored BT's could be unilaterally deaf. It is unlikely that a colored will be bilaterally deaf since there seems to be a linkage with genes for white color, whereas a colored BT has only one gene for white or, if a solid colored BT, no white gene. Even animals with normal hearing can produce puppies which are deaf in one ear if there are deaf BT's among their ancestors. Bull Terriers which are deaf in one ear seem to lead fairly normal lives. The most obvious difference from a normal dog is their difficulty in determining the direction of sound. A unilaterally deaf pup may seem bewildered as he tries to figure out where a sound is coming from. No doubt such puppies have been in the breed for many years. Now, the BAER test makes their identification possible. This is an electronic test which measures the electrical activity along the nerves connecting the ear with the brain. If there is no electrical activity, no sound is getting through. The letters BAER stand for "brainstem auditory evoked response."

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Authored by  
**Marilyn Drewes**



**Bull Terrier Rescue**  
**1 800 BTBT 911**

**Bull Terrier Rescue in Canada**  
Coordinators:

Jean Bridge  
(905) 935-9633