

Does Your Pet Do This When Walking or Exercising Hard? Don't Ignore It

Don't blow off this seemingly harmless symptom. It's linked to this progressive disease. Certain breeds are predisposed, and certain conditions can exacerbate it. Discover its classic symptom, 14 additional symptoms, tips for diagnosis and especially for their comfort management.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Chronic bronchitis is a condition in which there is persistent inflammation in the airways that move oxygen from the trachea to the lungs
- Chronic bronchitis is seen most often in toy and small dog breeds, however, larger dogs and cats can also suffer from the condition
- Triggers for bronchitis include infections, parasites, airborne fumes, mold and dust
- The classic symptom of chronic bronchitis is a harsh, dry, and hacking cough
- Treatment for a pet's chronic bronchitis is aimed at eliminating the underlying cause of the condition, relieving airway inflammation, slowing the progression of the disease, and alleviating coughing

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Chronic bronchitis is a condition in which there is persistent inflammation of the mucous membranes of the bronchi, which are the airways that carry oxygen from the trachea to the lungs.

Over time, the airways become thickened and narrowed, reducing the animal's ability to inhale and exhale air properly, which adversely affects the normal transport and exchange of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other substances. The disorder is also known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Chronic bronchitis is seen most often in toy and small dog breeds, including the West Highland White Terrier and the Cocker Spaniel. However, large breed dogs can also develop the disorder.

Obesity is often a complicating factor for dogs with chronic bronchitis. Cats also acquire COPD, especially Siamese and domestic shorthairs.

Triggers for Chronic Bronchitis

Triggers for bronchitis include:

- Bacterial and viral infections
- Internal parasites such as lungworms and heartworms
- Feline asthma
- Airborne fumes, including second hand smoke and room deodorizers
- Household chemicals, including the off gassing of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) or flame retardants present in most upholstered surfaces and pet beds
- Cleaning products
- Black mold and dust

When bronchitis occurs suddenly or acutely, it's typically caused by infectious organisms, such a virus, bacteria, or lung parasite.

Chronic Bronchitis Symptoms

The classic sign of bronchitis is a harsh, dry, and hacking cough that may or may not be productive. When the condition is chronic, the cough lasts more than two months and is not the result of any identifiable condition, such as heart failure, neoplasia (cancer), infections, or other respiratory diseases.

The cough is often worse when the animal is exercising or engaging in physical activity, is under stress, or when there is physical pressure placed on the trachea (wind pipe), such as when a dog strains against a collar and leash.

A pet with a cough should always wear a harness for restraint and not a collar, which goes around the neck and trachea. Cats with bronchitis tend to hunch down in a squat position and stretch their necks out when they cough. Additional chronic bronchitis symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Exercise intolerance
- Retching or gagging
- Lethargy
- Passing foamy saliva at the end of a coughing fit
- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Rapid breathing
- Sneezing
- Decreased activity level
- Runny nose
- Lack of appetite
- Weepy eyes
- Weight loss

In worst-case scenarios, symptoms can also include bluish discoloration of the mucous membranes (cyanosis), and spontaneous loss of consciousness from a lack of oxygen.

Diagnosing Chronic Bronchitis

Chronic bronchitis is a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning it is made after all other potential causes of your pet's symptoms have been ruled out. Your veterinarian will take a complete history on your pet and perform a physical examination. In chronic bronchitis, the cough can often be triggered by palpating the trachea. In addition, your vet will be able to hear lung sounds characteristic of the disorder.

Chest X-rays will be taken, along with a complete blood count (CBC), serum biochemistry profile, and urinalysis. Your vet may also decide to test for the presence of lungworms and heartworms. He or she might want to obtain a sample of cells from the airways to check for the presence of a bacterial infection in a process called a transtracheal wash.

Sometimes, bronchoscopy (using an endoscope with a camera at one end) may also be performed so your veterinarian can visualize the lining of your pet's upper respiratory tract, and take samples of tumors or abnormal findings within the airways. An echocardiogram may also be performed in the event your vet suspects congestive heart failure.

Treatment Options and Recommendations

Treatment for a pet's chronic bronchitis is aimed at eliminating the underlying cause of the condition, if known. Therapy should involve relieving inflammation of the lining of the airways, resolving any secondary respiratory tract infections, slowing down the progression of the disease, and alleviating the frequency and severity of coughing.

It's important to note that it's rarely possible to completely eliminate coughing in a pet with chronic bronchitis. The goal is to control the coughing naturally as much as possible.

Any identified and potential triggers for airway irritation should be removed from your pet's environment, including dust, mold, airborne fumes, perfumes, carpet cleaners, air deodorizers, fertilizers and pesticides, cigarette smoke, and smoke from a fireplace or wood-burning stove.

Remove all toxic pet beds from your house. If you're in a new or newly renovated home where there might be toxic off gassing from paints, carpets, or new furniture, I recommend purchasing an in-room air purifier. Also make sure to replace furnace air filters frequently.

Obese pets must be gradually and safely dieted down to a healthy weight, because excess weight exacerbates any breathing problem. Exercise is important for pets with COPD, because it helps clear secretions from the airways. However, exercise must only be implemented gradually, as it can also cause excessive coughing.

Coupage, which is a type of vigorous thoracic massage and phlegm-releasing hands-on therapy, can be very beneficial for pets with bronchitis. Your veterinarian can show you how to do it. Traditional treatments for chronic bronchitis include anti-inflammatory drugs, cough suppressants, bronchodilators, and antimicrobials if there's a bacterial infection present. Integrative or holistic options include:

- Homeopathic and TCM remedies, based on your pet's set of symptoms
- Ozone therapy

- Nebulization therapy with mucolytic agents (such as n-acetyl cysteine (NAC), trade name Mucomyst)
- Diffusing small amounts of essential oils, including eucalyptus, lemon, and thyme
- Oral supplementation of NAC, glutathione, and herbs such as turmeric, mullein, oregano, olive leaf, and slippery elm

Reducing pro-inflammatory processed foods can also help, as well as avoiding unnecessary vaccines that stimulate the immune system and can prompt an inflammatory response.

Why It's so Important to Get Control of Your Pet's Chronic Bronchitis

Chronic bronchitis is a progressive disease that causes physical and physiologic changes in the airways. However, most affected dogs can be well-managed medically and can go on to enjoy an excellent quality of life and a normal lifespan. If your cat has chronic bronchitis, it's important to reduce any and all stressors in her environment as well as triggers. It's important that her environment is kept quiet, comfortable, clean, and safe.

Very often, chronic feline asthma leads to chronic bronchitis in kitties. The asthma must be well-controlled in order to manage concurrent COPD. Bronchitis in kitties can be life-threatening and must be managed appropriately. Persistent, unaddressed coughing can permanently damage a cat's airways, interfere with her ability to eat normally, and damage her immune system, which can set her up for secondary bacterial and viral infections.

If your pet has been coughing for a while and you don't have a diagnosis, ask your veterinarian about the possibility of chronic bronchitis. Begin eliminating potential triggers from your environment, and implement the integrative therapy tools I've just suggested.
