

This Cute Canine Quirk Might Make You Laugh Out Loud

This could tickle your funny bone, especially if on top of it, your dog starts barking at his own noise. But if you want to give the little guy a break, here are 4 steps you can take. Along with one that'll reduce the number of times he gives you this outburst of laughter.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Puppies and even some adult dogs can have episodes of hiccupping just like people
- Hiccupping in pups is often associated with eating or drinking, excitement or nervousness, and stops as suddenly as it starts
- To help a puppy stop hiccupping, try a drink of water, a distraction such as a toy or a gentle chest massage
- To help prevent episodes, feed a species-appropriate, grain and starch-free diet, and take steps to stop your dog from gulping his meals
- If she tends to gulp her food (and swallow a lot of air, which can precipitate a bout of hiccupping), offer her smaller, more frequent meals

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If you've spent any time around puppies, you've probably noticed that just like people, they can get the hiccups. On the one hand, a hiccupping pup is impossibly cute, especially when the little guy starts barking at his hiccups!

Anatomy of a Hiccup

"Hiccup" is the term given to an uncontrolled spasm or contraction of the diaphragm, which is a dome-shaped area of skeletal muscle that separates your dog's chest from his abdomen. When he breathes in, the diaphragm contracts and drops a bit to make room for the lungs to expand with air.

When he exhales, the diaphragm relaxes and moves back up into the chest cavity, helping to expel air from the lungs. These contracting and expanding movements are normally smooth and rhythmic, but once in awhile the diaphragm spasms, resulting in a hiccup.

Hiccups and Pups

The good news is that hiccups are completely normal for most puppies, and they can actually begin in the womb before birth. It's thought that hiccups help developing pups exercise their respiratory system and related muscles.

Healthy puppies often hiccup throughout the day, with episodes lasting from seconds to several minutes. The hiccups usually stop as suddenly as they start, and often follow eating or drinking, especially if puppy is a gulper. Dogs can also get the hiccups when they're excited, anxious or as a result of excessive barking. Most young dogs tend to grow out of their hiccupping stage, and the majority of adult dogs rarely get the hiccups.

While most cases of hiccups are harmless, once in a great while they can be a sign of a more serious underlying problem, such as a respiratory defect, pneumonia, asthma, pericarditis or heat stroke. If your puppy or dog hiccups for more than a few hours, it's time to call your veterinarian.

Helping a Hiccupping Pup

Most hiccup spells don't last long and aren't harmful to the dog. In fact, most dogs don't seem particularly bothered by hiccups, unlike, for example, dogs who reverse sneeze:

1. **A drink of water** — Offer your dog a little water. Since hiccups are involuntary and can sometimes be forceful, to avoid a potential choking situation, don't feed your pup anything in an attempt to interrupt the cycle.
2. **A distraction** — Sometimes all that's necessary to quell hiccups is to distract puppy with a toy or game or training exercise.
3. **A massage** — Gently massage your dog's chest to help relax the diaphragm.
4. **A change of pace** — If the hiccups come on when she's playing or running, slow her down to a walk to change her breathing pattern. If she starts hiccupping on a walk, invite her to run.

To help cut down on the number of hiccupping episodes, look for a pattern in when your puppy hiccups. If you can identify a trigger, when feasible try to avoid it.

Also be sure to feed your dog a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate, fresh food diet with very low to no grains or starches. Grain-based dog foods may be linked to hiccups, and in addition, the easier her food is to digest and assimilate, the healthier she'll be overall. Also provide her with clean, fresh, filtered drinking water free from fluoride and chlorine.

If she tends to gulp her food (and swallow a lot of air, which can precipitate a bout of hiccupping), offer her smaller, more frequent meals, or try one of the following:

- Use a puzzle feeder, treat-release toy, cookie sheet or muffin tin to put the brakes on gulping
- Use mealtime to tune up your dog's obedience skills or teach her new commands or tricks and reward her with bites of food instead of training treats
- Purchase a stainless steel (not plastic) slow feeder bowl like the Brake-Fast, make your own by placing a large round object in the middle of the bowl or purchase a portion pacer made of stainless steel or porcelain

Sources and References

