

Exaggerated features factsheet



What are they?

Many types of dog have been bred to emphasise certain features. For example some have been selected to have short legs, others to have floppy ears.

These are the physical features that make dog breeds distinct and which have led to the amazing variety we see today.

But over the years some characteristics have become so extreme that dogs may suffer.

Certain features can cause pain and suffering, some make dogs prone to particular disorders, and some prevent them from behaving normally.

Some examples

Think of some of the aspects of dogs which may look cute or quirky, and consider how they may affect a dog's life. Some examples of exaggerated features are listed below, but there are many more.

- Dogs with short flat faces often have narrow nostrils and abnormally developed windpipes. They can often suffer severe breathing difficulties and may have difficulty enjoying a walk or playing.
- Very large and heavy dogs are more likely to suffer heart, digestion, muscle or joint problems, and live shorter lives.
- Dogs with folded or wrinkled skin are prone to itchy and painful skin complaints, and infolding eyelids that can scratch the eye ball.
- Dogs with very long backs can suffer crippling back deformities.
- Dogs with ridges along their backs are prone to nervous system problems.
- Dogs with very curly or short tails can have trouble communicating properly with other dogs as they can't raise or wag their tails. Dogs with screw tails can also suffer crippling back deformities.
- Dogs with bulging or sunken eyes are prone to injury, pain or discomfort.
- Dogs that have large heads but small hips have trouble giving birth, risking their lives or needing surgery.
- Dogs with long floppy ears often suffer ear infections or injury and cannot move their ears to communicate with other dogs.
- Dogs with very short legs have difficulty moving properly.
- Hairless dogs have trouble keeping warm.

Remember, these are just some examples, but there are many more so do your research carefully before deciding on the right puppy for you.

In certain dog breeds, these features seem "normal" – but that doesn't mean they are not a problem.

A recent study showed that all of the 50 most popular breeds have some aspect of their body which can cause suffering.

The problems range from irritating, to life-threatening or requiring risky surgery.

It's important to remember that dogs feel pain similarly to people, so if a feature would cause you pain or discomfort, it's likely to do the same to a dog.

What can I do?

Think very carefully about the likely impact of physical features on a dogs' life before buying a puppy.

Find out what problems are common in the sort of dog you are considering. The Canine Inherited Disorders Database - www.upei.ca/cidd may help, as you can look up “disorders associated with conformation” for each breed you are considering.

Although exaggerated features are more common in pedigree dogs bred for showing, they can still occur in cross breeds, so you still need to choose a puppy carefully.

If you decide on a type of dog which can suffer from exaggerated features, select an individual bred for less extreme characteristics.

For example

- If you're choosing a breed with a flat face, choose a dog with a less flattened face, and check its parents can breathe easily.
- If choosing very large or small breeds, avoid choosing the largest or smallest individuals.

Many breeders are keen to try to breed away from extreme features so choose a responsible breeder.

Dogs that are unable to walk or breathe easily are unlikely to lead fulfilling lives.

Remember

Don't buy a puppy because you feel sorry for it – another will be bred to replace it!