



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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Deafness

Issue Description

A hearing impairment is a full or partial decrease in the ability to detect or understand sounds. Caused by a wide range of biological and environmental factors, loss of hearing can happen to any organism that perceives sound.

Other Names

Hearing Impairment

Causes

There are over 80 breeds where congenital deafness is considered common. The highest incidence of this is in breeds such as Australian Cattle Dogs, Australian Shepherds, Bull Terriers, Dalmatians, English Cocker Spaniels, and English Setters. Of these, the Dalmatian breed has the highest incidence of deafness.

There are two types of deafness - acquired and congenital. Congenital deafness occurs due to a defective gene that results in a malformation or nonfunctional ear. Some breeds are more susceptible to deafness than others. Congenital deafness in dogs is permanent.

Acquired deafness occurs for any number of reasons.

Some causes of hearing loss include:

- Excessive amounts of wax
- Dirt, hair or other material plugging the ear canal
- Inflammation or swelling of the ear canal
- Infections of the middle or internal ear
- A torn or ruptured ear drum; loud noise
- Head trauma
- Ear mites
- Certain drugs
- Old age

Symptoms

- Inattentiveness or a change in obedience
- Confusion when given familiar vocal sounds
- Excessive barking
- Unresponsiveness to sounds
- Being difficult to wake up
- Head shaking
- Head tilts toward the side of the affected ear
- Itchy and/or painful ears
- Change in personality
- A smelly discharge from the ear.

Diagnosis

Your vet can initially examine your dog's ear canal for wax accumulation, infections, inflammation, injury or foreign

object. For more serious cases, one common procedure is BAER (Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response). During the procedure, small electrodes are placed under the skin of a dog's scalp to measure (visibly on a computer screen) his auditory response to outside stimuli.

Treatment

There is no treatment for congenital canine deafness but it must be understood that there are different levels of deafness from partial to severe to total. Those with total deafness are prone to injury as they are unable to respond to any verbal warnings from their owners. In saying this a dog who suffers from total loss of hearing can be taught to respond to hand signals and the use of lights can also be applied in the training and care of this type of pet.

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Keeping Your Deaf Dog Safe

There are many things that you can do to keep your deaf or hearing-impaired dog safe. Deaf dogs should be kept on a leash or in a fenced-in yard while outdoors. Children should also be taught how to interact with, and behave around, deaf dogs.

Learning how to communicate with, and train, your dog using hand signals is important. Whether you use your own signals, standard obedience signs, American Sign Language or a combination of these, it is important that you, and others, who communicate with your dog, are consistent with the signs you use. As well, it is a good idea to use signs that only use one hand and are easily detected by your dog from a distance.

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