

Your Maltese

Caring for Your Faithful Companion



Maltese: What a Unique Breed!

Your dog is special! She's your best friend, companion, and a source of unconditional love. Chances are that you chose her because you like Maltese and you expected her to have certain traits that would fit your lifestyle:

- Trusting and affectionate
- Gentle-mannered and easy to get along with
- Highly intelligent, playful, and energetic
- Wonderful companion and family dog
- Hypoallergenic coat, sheds very little
- Good around other pets and dogs

However, no dog is perfect! You may have also noticed these characteristics:

- Coat needs to be cared for frequently to prevent matting and tear staining
- Can be snappy with children
- Has a tendency to bark quite a bit if not trained out of this habit
- Can be difficult to houstrain
- Fragile and easily injured due to small size
- Prone to separation anxiety and associated barking and chewing behaviors

Is it all worth it? Of course! She's full of personality, and you love her for it! Known as one of the more gentle breeds of the toy group, Maltese tend to get along with everyone, making her the perfect playmate!

When and where the Maltese originated is not entirely clear, however, they were a recognized breed in Malta at least thousands of years ago, once referred to as "Ye ancient dogge of Malta." The Maltese has always been primarily a companion pet and was kept by royalty all over the world—women could be seen carrying them in the sleeves of their elaborate dresses and robes. Maybe this explains why Maltese love to be held! A Maltese typically weighs 2 to 8



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pounds and has a beautiful long and silky coat. Although small, they do require regular exercise and tend to be quite playful even when indoors. The Maltese is a generally healthy breed with an average lifespan of 14-15 years.

Your Maltese's Health

We know that because you care so much about your dog, you want to take good care of her. That is why we have summarized the health concerns we will be discussing with you over the life of your Maltese. By knowing about health concerns specific to Maltese, we can tailor a preventive health plan to watch for and hopefully prevent some predictable risks.

Many diseases and health conditions are genetic, meaning they are related to your pet's breed. There is a general consensus among canine genetic researchers and veterinary practitioners that the conditions we've described herein have a significant rate of incidence and/or impact in this breed. That does not mean your dog will have these problems; it just means that she is more at risk than other dogs. We will describe the most common issues seen in Maltese to give you an idea of what may come up in her future. Of course, we can't cover every possibility here, so always check with us if you notice any unusual signs or symptoms.

This guide contains general health information important to all canines as well as the most important genetic predispositions for Maltese. This information helps you and us together plan for your pet's unique medical needs. At the end of the booklet, we have also included a description of what you can do at home to keep your Maltese looking and feeling her best. You will know what to watch for, and we will all feel better knowing that we're taking the best possible care of your pal.

General Health Information for your Maltese

Dental Disease

Dental disease is the most common chronic problem in pets, affecting 80% of all dogs by age two. Unfortunately, your Malty is more likely than other dogs to have problems with her teeth. Dental disease starts with tartar build-up on the teeth and progresses to infection of the gums and roots of the teeth. If we don't prevent or treat dental disease, your buddy may lose her teeth and be in danger of damage to her kidneys, liver, heart, and joints. In fact, your Maltese's life span may even be cut short by one to three years! We'll clean your dog's teeth regularly and let you know what you can do at home to keep those pearly whites clean.

Infections

Maltese are susceptible to bacterial and viral infections — the same ones that all dogs can get — such as parvo, rabies, and distemper. Many of these infections are preventable through vaccination, which we will recommend based on her age, the diseases we see in our area, and other factors.

Obesity

Obesity can be a significant health problem in Maltese. It is a serious disease that may cause or worsen joint problems, metabolic and digestive disorders, back pain, and heart disease. Though it's tempting to give your pal food when she looks at you with those soulful eyes, you can "love her to death" with leftover people food and doggie treats. Instead, give her a hug, brush her fur or teeth, play a game with her, or perhaps take her for a walk. She'll feel better, and so will you!

Parasites

All kinds of worms and bugs can invade your Maltese's body, inside and out. Everything from fleas and ticks to ear mites can infest her skin and ears. Hookworms, roundworms, heartworms, and whipworms can get into her system in a number of ways: drinking unclean water, walking on contaminated soil, or being bitten by an infected mosquito. Some of these parasites can be transmitted to you or a family member and are a serious concern for everyone. For your canine friend, these parasites can cause pain, discomfort, and even death, so it's important that we test for them on a regular basis. We'll also recommend preventive medication as necessary to keep her healthy.

Spay or Neuter

One of the best things you can do for your Maltese is to have her spayed (neutered for males). In females, this means we surgically remove the ovaries and usually the uterus, and in males, it means we surgically remove the testicles. Spaying or neutering decreases the likelihood of certain types of cancers and eliminates the possibility of your pet becoming pregnant or fathering unwanted puppies. Performing this surgery also gives us a chance, while your pet is under anesthesia, to identify and address some of the diseases your dog is likely to develop. For example, if your pet needs hip X-rays or a puppy tooth extracted, this would be a good time—it's more convenient for you and easier on your friend too. Routine blood testing prior to surgery also helps us to identify and take precautions against

common problems that increase anesthetic or surgical risk. Don't worry; we'll discuss the specific problems we will be looking for when the time arrives.

Genetic Predispositions for Maltese

Heart Disease

Maltese are susceptible to a condition called patent ductus arteriosus, or PDA, in which a small vessel that carries blood between two parts of the heart does not close as it should shortly after birth. This results in too much blood being carried to the lungs, causing fluid build-up and strain on the heart. Outward signs may be mild or severe, including coughing, fatigue during exercise, weight loss, shortness of breath, and weakness in the hind limbs. We listen for a specific type of heart murmur to diagnose this problem during your pet's examinations. If your pal has this condition, we may recommend surgery to close the problematic vessel.

- Heart failure is a leading cause of death among Maltese in their golden years. Most heart disease in dogs is caused by the weakening or slow deformity of heart valves such that they no longer close tightly; blood then leaks back around these weakened valves, straining the heart. Pets with heart valve disease (sometimes called mitral valve disease) have a heart murmur. If your dog has a heart murmur or outward signs suggesting heart problems, we'll perform testing to determine the severity of the disease. The same tests will need to be repeated at least every year to monitor the condition. If heart valve disease is diagnosed early, we may be able to prescribe medications that could prolong your pet's life for many years. Veterinary dental care and fatty acid supplementation can also help prevent heart disease, and weight control can help diminish symptoms.

Liver Problems

Your Maltese is more likely than other dogs to have a liver disorder called portosystemic shunt (PSS). Some of the blood supply that should go to the liver goes around it instead, depriving the liver of the blood flow it needs to grow and function properly. If your friend has PSS, his liver cannot remove toxins from his bloodstream effectively. To check for this problem, we'll conduct a liver function test in addition to a standard pre-anesthetic panel every time he undergoes anesthesia. If he develops symptoms such as stunted growth or seizures, we'll test his blood and possibly conduct an ultrasound scan of his liver. Surgery may be needed, but in some cases, we can treat with a special diet and medication.

Eye Problems

Not many things have as dramatic an impact on your dog's quality of life as the proper functioning of his eyes. Unfortunately, Maltese can inherit or develop a number of different eye conditions, some of which may cause blindness if not treated right away, and most of which can be extremely painful! We will evaluate his eyes at every examination to look for any signs for concern.

- Glaucoma, an eye condition that affects Maltese and people too, is an extremely painful disease that rapidly

leads to blindness if left untreated. Symptoms include squinting, watery eyes, bluing of the cornea (the clear front part of the eye), and redness in the whites of the eyes. Pain is rarely noticed by pet owners though it is frequently there and can be severe. People who have certain types of glaucoma often report it feels like being stabbed in the eye with an ice pick! Yikes! In advanced cases, the eye may look enlarged or swollen like it's bulging. We'll perform an annual glaucoma screening to diagnose and start treatment as early as possible. Glaucoma is a medical emergency. If you see symptoms, don't wait to call us, go to an emergency clinic!

- Cataracts are a common cause of blindness in older Maltese. We'll watch for the lenses of his eyes to become more opaque—meaning they look cloudy instead of clear—when we examine him. Many dogs adjust well to losing their vision and get along just fine. Surgery to remove cataracts and restore sight may also be an option.
- Distichiasis is a condition caused by extra hairs that grow inside of the eyelid and rub on the surface of the eye. This is one of the most commonly inherited diseases in dogs, and your Maltese is more likely than other dogs to develop this painful condition. If untreated, these abnormal hairs can cause corneal ulcers and chronic eye pain. Several treatment options are available, and the prognosis is good once the hairs have been permanently removed.

Knee Problems

Sometimes your Maltese's kneecap (patella) may slip out of place. This is called patellar luxation. You might notice that your pet, while running, suddenly picks up a back leg or skips and hops for a few strides. He might then kick his leg out sideways to pop the kneecap back in place. These are common signs of patellar luxation. If the problem is mild and involves only one leg, your friend may not require much treatment beyond arthritis medication. When symptoms are severe, surgery may be needed to realign the kneecap to keep it from luxating further.

Bleeding Disorders

There are several types of inherited bleeding disorders that occur in dogs. They range in severity from very mild to very severe. Many times a pet seems normal until a serious injury occurs or surgery is performed, and then severe bleeding can result. Maltese are particularly prone to some relatively rare diseases of the blood.

- Hemolytic anemia and thrombocytopenia occur when the immune system goes haywire and starts attacking the pet's own red blood cells or platelets. If the immune system destroys red blood cells, your dog quickly becomes anemic, weak, and lethargic. His gums will look whitish or yellow instead of a normal bright pink color. If the immune system destroys platelets, his blood won't clot properly and he'll have bruises or abnormal bleeding. We'll perform diagnostic testing for blood clotting to check for these problems before we perform any surgeries. To slow or stop the immune system's destruction of cells, we'll prescribe steroids and other immune-suppressive



drugs. Sometimes an emergency transfusion of red blood cells or platelets is needed.

- Von Willebrand's disease is a blood clotting disorder frequently found in Maltese. We'll conduct diagnostic testing for blood clotting times or a specific DNA blood test for Von Willebrand's disease and other similar disorders to check for this problem before we perform surgery.

Dental Abnormalities

Teeth abnormalities are often genetically induced and are relatively common in dogs, especially in purebred dogs like your Maltese. An overbite or underbite is called a malocclusion or a bad bite. Oligodontia is a condition in which only a few teeth are present. Misaligned teeth can also occur and cause lots of problems, but can usually be corrected with braces or extractions. (Yes, dogs can get braces!) We want to keep your buddy's teeth healthy, so we will be watching his developing teeth closely.

Retained Puppy Teeth

Dogs normally begin to lose their primary ("puppy") teeth at around 4 months of age. If the primary teeth don't fall out as the adult teeth come in, infection or damage to the adult teeth may occur. Retained puppy teeth crowd the incoming adult teeth and can trap food and hair between the teeth causing cavities and infections. Painful gums, bad breath, and adult tooth loss can result if untreated. Retained teeth are common in small breeds like Maltese, but we'll monitor your pet's growing teeth at each exam and discuss removal of any retained puppy teeth with you when indicated.

Digestive Disorders

Several inherited conditions can cause recurring vomiting, diarrhea, or weight loss in your Maltese. These conditions include pancreatic or intestinal disease, food sensitivities, and food allergies. Some of these problems may begin very early in life. To help prevent these conditions, feed only a high-quality pet food (we can help you choose the right diet) and, most importantly, avoid snacks and table food. Treats that are high in fat, sodium, or artificial ingredients (like people food) are

particularly bad for your buddy's digestion.

- Inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD, is an immune system disorder common in Maltese in which the intestinal lining becomes overrun with immune system cells called lymphocytes and plasmacytes. The stomach and/or intestinal lining becomes thickened affecting his ability to absorb nutrients properly. Chronic vomiting or diarrhea is common, or symptoms may flare up suddenly and then improve again for a time. Stress, diet change, or intestinal parasites can make IBD worse. If your friend has diarrhea or digestive upsets that are not explained by more common reasons, diagnostic tests, which may include intestinal biopsy, will be needed. Lifelong medications and special diets are usually required to keep IBD under control.

Skin Conditions

Maltese are prone to a variety of skin problems, including sebaceous adenitis. You may notice that your dog has dry, scaly skin with patches of hair loss along the top of his head, back of the neck, and along his back. This condition typically develops when your dog is between one and five years of age. Treatment is generally long term, and we'll likely try a combination of approaches to determine which is most effective with your dog. The response to treatment is highly variable, but you'll almost always need to give fatty acid supplements and use special shampoos to remove dead skin and hair. The earlier the skin is checked out, the better the results.

- Your Maltese is susceptible to various kinds of skin infections and diseases. One type, *Malassezia* dermatitis, is caused by a kind of yeast. When this yeast infects the ears, it causes itching, redness, and an accumulation of brown, waxy discharge. On the skin, this yeast leads to greasy, hairless areas, especially on the neck and throat, with a characteristic odor. Another common skin disease called seborrhea can cause dry, flaky skin or greasy, oily skin. Skin diseases make your pet itchy and uncomfortable. Bathing with special shampoos and rinses may be helpful, and we'll treat any underlying problems such as allergies as well. The earlier you call to have your pet's skin problems checked, the less likely you will end up with an itchy, bald, smelly dog!

Thyroid Problems

Maltese are prone to a common condition called hypothyroidism in which the body doesn't make enough thyroid hormone. Signs can include dry skin and coat, hair loss, susceptibility to other skin diseases, weight gain, fearfulness, aggression, and other behavioral changes. We'll conduct a blood test annually to screen for this disease. Treatment is usually as simple as replacement hormones given in the form of a pill.

Tracheal Collapse

The trachea, or windpipe, is made up of rings of cartilage that look similar to the ridged hose of a vacuum cleaner. This ridged structure provides both flexibility and strength to the trachea. In Maltese, these cartilage rings are sometimes weak or incorrectly formed. As a result, the trachea can collapse and become too narrow, leading to coughing or difficulty breathing. Most cases of tracheal collapse are mild and can be treated symptomatically with medication. When symptoms are severe, however, surgery may be recommended.

Deafness

Heritable deafness has been noted in some Maltese bloodlines, so if his ears are healthy and he's still ignoring you, a more thorough hearing workup may be needed, including brainwave analysis, if indicated. If you suspect your pet may not be hearing as well as he should, schedule an appointment with us right away as the problem could also be caused by a severe ear infection.

Taking Care of Your Maltese at Home

Much of what you can do to keep your dog happy and healthy is common sense, just like it is for people. Watch her diet, make sure she gets plenty of exercise, regularly brush her teeth and coat, and call us or a pet emergency hospital when something seems unusual (see "What to Watch For" below). Be sure to adhere to the schedule of examinations and vaccinations that we recommend for her. This is when we'll give her the necessary "check-ups" and test for diseases and conditions that are common in Maltese. Another very important step in caring for your pet is signing up for pet health insurance. There will certainly be medical tests and procedures she will need throughout her life and pet health insurance will help you cover those costs.

Routine Care, Diet, and Exercise

Build her routine care into your schedule to help your Maltese live longer, stay healthier, and be happier during her lifetime. We cannot overemphasize the importance of a proper diet and exercise routine.

- ✓ Supervise your pet as you would a toddler. Keep doors closed, pick up after yourself, and block off rooms as necessary. This will keep her out of trouble and away from objects she shouldn't put in her mouth.
- ✓ Daily brushing and regular grooming is needed every 6-8 weeks to keep her coat beautiful.
- ✓ Maltese often have serious problems with their teeth, so you'll need to brush them at least three times a week!
- ✓ Clean her ears weekly, even as a puppy. Don't worry—we'll show you how!
- ✓ She is well suited to apartment life as long as she is given daily walks and short play sessions.
- ✓ She can have a tendency to sunburn due to her all-white coat, so avoid prolonged exposure to the sun.
- ✓ She can be taught to perform a variety of tricks to help keep her mentally stimulated.
- ✓ Keep your dog's diet consistent and don't give her people food.
- ✓ Feed a high-quality diet appropriate for her age.
- ✓ Exercise your dog regularly, but don't overdo it at first.

What to Watch For

Any abnormal symptom could be a sign of serious disease or it

could just be a minor or temporary problem. The important thing is to be able to tell when to seek veterinary help and how urgently. Many diseases cause dogs to have a characteristic combination of symptoms, which together can be a clear signal that your Maltese needs help.

Office calls

Give us a call for an appointment if you notice any of these types of signs:

- ✓ Change in appetite or water consumption
- ✓ Tartar build-up, bad breath, red gums, or broken teeth
- ✓ Itchy skin (scratching, chewing, or licking); hair loss
- ✓ Lethargy, mental dullness, or excessive sleeping
- ✓ Fearfulness, aggression, or other behavioral changes
- ✓ Dull coat, hair loss; sluggish, weight gain
- ✓ Easily startled, no reaction to unseen sounds
- ✓ Slow or stunted growth; sometimes seizes after eating

Emergencies

Seek medical care immediately if you notice any of these types of signs:

- ✓ Scratching or shaking the head, tender ears, or ear discharge
- ✓ Inability or straining to urinate; discolored urine
- ✓ Cloudiness, redness, itching, or any other abnormality involving the eyes
- ✓ Fatigue during exercise, coughing, or shortness of breath
- ✓ Coughing, especially at night or upon rising after sleeping, rapid breathing at rest
- ✓ Gums that are a color other than bright pink
- ✓ Bruises easily or bleeds a lot even from small wounds
- ✓ On-going vomiting, weight loss, and/or diarrhea

Genetic/DNA Testing



DNA analysis is a rapidly advancing field in healthcare for people and pets. Luckily, technologies exist to screen for hundreds of inherited diseases in pets, just like in people. By screening each pet for as many genetic diseases as possible, we will be better prepared to care for your pet throughout life. This is an important step in caring for your pet because it's always better to know your pal is at risk for a genetic disease before the problem is untreatable.

In an effort to screen for as many genetically linked diseases as possible, we may recommend the **K9Genetics™ Disease Screen** to screen for more than 150 genetic mutations that cause disease.

Each **K9Genetics™ Disease Screen** Screens for

- ✓ Over 30 Musculoskeletal Problems
- ✓ Over 30 Metabolic Conditions
- ✓ Over 30 Eye Conditions
- ✓ Over 25 Blood and Clotting Disorders
- ✓ Over 10 Immune System Diseases
- ✓ Over 10 Urinary Tract Problems
- ✓ 10 Skin and Hair Conditions
- ✓ Cancer
- ✓ Dental Disease
- ✓ Drug Metabolism
- ✓ Heart Problems
- ✓ Hormonal Conditions
- ✓ Liver/Gastrointestinal Diseases
- ✓ Midline Defect
- ✓ Neuromuscular Diseases
- ✓ Reproduction Problems
- ✓ Respiratory Conditions

This one-time test is one of the best decisions you can make for your Maltese's medical care. With less than a few drops of blood, we'll have a lifetime of information to assist us in providing the very best care of your friend's unique and individual needs throughout her life!

For more information about genetic testing, visit <http://www.k9genetics.com>

Your Maltese counts on you to take good care of her, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that she lives a long and healthy life. Our goal is to provide the best health care possible: health care that's based on her breed, lifestyle, and age. Please contact us when you have questions or concerns:

Pet Medical Center
254-690-6769

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Puppy to Adolescent Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Maltese Healthy

Puppy to Adolescent: Infant to 17 in People Years

(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide	Maltese-Specific Problems We're Looking For
○	6–9 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Neurologic assessment Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss socialization and at-home puppy care	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Dental alignment, heart murmur, and hernia Distichiasis Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA) and Portosystemic shunt (PSS) Deafness Hemophilia
○	10–13 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Blood disorder evaluation Parasite detection/prevention Vaccinations Discuss caring for your dog's teeth and ears at home	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis Prognathism, Brachygnathism, Oligodontia, and Wry mouth Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA) and Hemophilia
○	14–16 weeks	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Schedule spay/neuter surgery Discuss obedience and grooming	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis Prognathism, Brachygnathism, Oligodontia, and Wry mouth Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA) and Portosystemic shunt (PSS) Hemophilia
○	4–6 months	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Blood disorder evaluation Pre-surgical diagnostics Spay/neuter surgery Discuss microchipping	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis Prognathism, Brachygnathism, Oligodontia, Wry mouth, and Retained primary teeth Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA) and Portosystemic shunt (PSS) Hemophilia
○	6 months through 1 year	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Oral health assessment Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Bone and joint exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss lifetime genetic considerations	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis Prognathism, Brachygnathism, Oligodontia, Wry mouth, and Retained primary teeth Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA) and Portosystemic shunt (PSS) Sebaceous Adenitis Tracheal collapse Patellar luxation Hemophilia All major disease important in the breed with diagnostic plan

Adult to Golden Years Health Care Recommendations

How We'll Keep Your Maltese					Maltese-Specific Problems We're Looking For
	(✓)	Age	Services We'll Provide		
	<input type="radio"/>	2 years through 7 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss behavior and nutrition	<input type="radio"/>	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis and Glaucoma Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), Portosystemic shunt (PSS), and Mitral Valvular disease Sebaceous Adenitis Tracheal collapse and Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) Hypothyroidism Patellar luxation Hemophilia and Immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA) and immune-mediated thrombocytopenia (ITP)
	<input type="radio"/>	8 years through 10 years	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	<input type="radio"/>	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis, Glaucoma, and Cataracts Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), Portosystemic shunt (PSS), and Mitral Valvular disease Sebaceous Adenitis Tracheal collapse and Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) Hypothyroidism Patellar luxation Hemophilia and Immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA) and immune-mediated thrombocytopenia (ITP)
<input type="radio"/>	11 years and older	Head-to-tail physical examination Eye disease screen Heart health check Skin and coat exam Internal organ health evaluation Endocrine screening Bone and joint exam Blood disorder evaluation Parasite prevention Vaccinations Discuss mental and physical well-being	<input type="radio"/>	Breed-specific physical abnormalities plus Distichiasis, Glaucoma, and Cataracts Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), Portosystemic shunt (PSS), and Mitral Valvular disease Sebaceous Adenitis Tracheal collapse and Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) Hypothyroidism Patellar luxation Hemophilia and Immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA) and immune-mediated thrombocytopenia (ITP)	

Note: We recommend twice-a-year examinations so that we may diagnose problems sooner. This approach also gives you the budget-friendly option of spreading preventive testing over two visits rather than one.