

# Learn the Signs of Laryngeal Paralysis in Your Dog

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LARYNGEAL PARALYSIS is a condition most commonly affecting older, larger breed dogs, but can occur in any canine and, rarely, in felines.

The most frequently affected breeds are Labrador Retrievers, St. Bernards, and Golden Retrievers. Puppies or young dogs of some breeds, such as the Bouvier des Flandres, may have congenital laryngeal paralysis, in which puppies are born with the condition. Trauma, tumors in the throat, and hypothyroidism have also been associated with the development of laryngeal paralysis, but often the cause is unknown.

Laryngeal paralysis affects the larynx, the organ commonly known as the voice box. In addition to producing sound, this organ is also responsible for protecting the tracheal opening. Many small muscles and sections of cartilage in the larynx work to close off the opening to the trachea during swallowing and open it during breathing. Laryngeal paralysis occurs when the nerves controlling movement of the muscles in the larynx do not function normally. This leads to an obstructed airway and limited, inefficient breathing. Unable to breathe normally, a dog with laryngeal paralysis may begin to panic or hyperventilate, which in turn can cause more serious complications. Because of these serious risks associated with laryngeal paralysis, early diagnosis and treatment is critical.

## Easing life for dogs who have had surgery

There are things you can do at home to help to prevent complications from arising after surgery. Follow your veterinarian's recommendations regarding feeding and exercise. Monitor your pet's water and food intake and reduce portion sizes if necessary. Use a Slow-Feed Bowl, which will prevent your dog from eating or drinking too rapidly.

## DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Fortunately, laryngeal paralysis does not come about suddenly. Clinical signs in dogs affected with this condition include a history of loud and noisy breathing, panting or gasping, changes to bark pitch, coughing, and a limited ability to exercise before tiring. In more advanced stages, cyanosis (a bluish tint to the gums which indicates a lack of oxygen) may be visible. If you believe your dog may be experiencing symptoms associated with laryngeal paralysis, contact your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will examine your dog's larynx to determine whether laryngeal paralysis is present. This generally requires sedation. Additional testing, such as chest and throat radiographs and thyroid and blood testing, will help rule out complications such as aspiration pneumonia, megaesophagus (dilated

esophagus), or tumors.

The most common surgical solution for the condition is the laryngeal tieback procedure. Sutures are used to reposition a part of the cartilage in the larynx to clear the obstructed airway. This surgery will help the dog breathe better, but the breathing often remains noisy. One fairly common and serious risk associated with this procedure is the development of aspiration pneumonia after surgery. Still, 90% of owners feel their dog has improved life quality after surgery. Despite the risks involved, surgery is sometimes a necessity for patients affected by laryngeal paralysis, and a small price to pay for the health of your beloved pet.