

Common Mini Schnauzer Health Problems

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As Schnauzer owners it is important for us to know what health issues are common in our breed. Being aware of these potential problems can help identify a problem before it becomes serious.

As a veterinarian the most common problems I see in adult Miniature Schnauzers are bladder stones, pancreatitis/hyperlipidemia, and hypothyroidism.

In young Minis I see cleft palate, liver shunts, and renal disease. In our older dogs heart problems, back problems and dental problems are common.

Bladder stones symptoms may first appear as frequent urination often with blood present. Oxylate and struvite stones are the most common for our breed. Struvite stones are frequently formed as the result of a chronic infection while oxylate stones are often the result of hypercalcemia (high blood calcium) or low pH of the urine.

Pancreatitis is inflammation of the area of the pancreas that produces digestive enzymes. These enzymes are released and cause inflammation of the pancreas resulting in abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea. Many Schnauzers have a sensitivity to fat in the diet which causes hyperlipidemia (elevated lipids) and pancreatitis. Hyperlipidemia can cause abdominal signs such as pain, diarrhea and vomiting as well as seizures in some cases.

Hypothyroidism is also common in Miniature Schnauzers. Affected dogs often show patterned hair loss affecting the body but not the head and legs, and may show weight gain, cold intolerance, poor healing of wounds, infertility, and/or a slow heart rate.

Other health issues common to Miniature Schnauzers are eye problems (cataracts and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)); skin problems including allergies and Schnauzer Comedones (Schnauzer Bumps).

Avian Tuberculosis has also been documented in our breed. Most dogs are resistant to Avian TB but some Schnauzers have an immune system dysfunction which allows the TB organism to develop in the lymph nodes and cause illness. Signs generally are insidious and include enlarged lymph nodes, inflamed tonsils and lack of appetite. Sadly, dogs with this disease usually do not survive.

In young Miniature Schnauzers there are several congenital (present at birth) problems that are occasionally seen. Juvenile Renal Disease, a condition where the kidneys do not develop properly and the dog goes into kidney failure at a young age, has been diagnosed in Miniature Schnauzers. Other developmental problems are portal systemic shunts where a normal blood vessel present in the unborn puppy fails to close at birth and causes blood to bypass the liver. Signs of this condition are poor weight gain, increased water intake and increased urination, ammonia bladder stones (also called urate stones), and hepatic encephalopathy--a condition caused by a buildup of ammonia in the blood which causes depression, incoordination, seizures and sometimes coma.

Megaesophagus and cleft palate are two additional congenital problems. Megaesophagus is a condition in which the esophagus lacks muscle tone and puppies have difficulty swallowing solid food. Cleft palate is a fissure (opening) in the roof of the mouth which makes it difficult for puppies to nurse.

Myotonia has been found in certain lines. This disease causes muscles to not relax properly. Affected animals have a stiff, stilted gait; many also show difficulty swallowing and often have an abnormal bark.

In our senior Schnauzers one of the more common conditions I see is Discospondilosis in which there is a fusion of the vertebra in the spine (usually in the lower back) causing stiffness and pain in the back. Older Schnauzers are also susceptible to heart problems such as murmurs and Sick Sinus Syndrome which is an irregular heartbeat occurring predominately in geriatric females causing weakness and fainting. Dental problems are also common in our older Schnauzers.

So as you can see there are problems common in our breed that can occur at all ages. Being aware of these conditions can help our pets by allowing for earlier diagnosis and treatment.

----- In addition to her veterinary occupation, Dr. Paula Steele is a Mini Schnauzer owner-breeder-handler and MS Rescuer who has graciously written informative articles for many of the earlier Mini Magazines. She is located in the Atlanta, GA, area.

