



## Breathing Problems in Pugs

### Understanding, Recognizing, and Managing Respiratory Issues

One of the most common health concerns in pugs is difficulty breathing. While many pugs live happy, active lives, their unique facial structure can make them more prone to respiratory problems than other breeds.

Understanding what is normal, what is not, and when to seek veterinary care can help keep your pug safe and comfortable.

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### Why Do Pugs Have Breathing Problems?

Pugs are considered a **brachycephalic breed**, meaning they have a shortened skull and muzzle. While their distinctive appearance is part of what makes them so lovable, it can also create challenges within the airway.

Many pugs have:

- Narrow nostrils (stenotic nares)
- An elongated soft palate
- Narrowed airways
- Increased airway resistance

Together, these conditions are often referred to as:

### **Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS)**

BOAS can range from very mild to severe and may worsen over time if left unmanaged.

# What's Normal for a Pug?

Many pugs:

- Snore while sleeping
- Snort occasionally
- Make funny breathing noises when excited
- Experience occasional reverse sneezing episodes

While these behaviors are common, they should not be confused with significant breathing difficulty.

A healthy pug should still be able to:

- Walk comfortably
- Recover quickly after exercise
- Sleep without frequent distress
- Maintain normal activity levels
- Breathe comfortably at rest

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## Signs Your Pug May Be Struggling to Breathe

Contact your veterinarian if you notice:

### Mild to Moderate Signs

- Loud breathing while awake
- Increased snoring
- Frequent gagging
- Exercise intolerance
- Excessive panting
- Difficulty cooling down
- Restlessness after activity

### More Serious Signs

- Labored breathing
- Blue, gray, or pale gums
- Open-mouth breathing at rest
- Collapse
- Fainting episodes
- Severe distress during exercise

These signs may indicate worsening airway obstruction and should be evaluated promptly.

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## Understanding Reverse Sneezing

Reverse sneezing is common in pugs and can be alarming if you've never seen it before.

During an episode, your pug may:

- Stand still
- Extend their neck
- Make rapid snorting sounds
- Appear unable to catch their breath

Most episodes last only a few seconds to a minute and resolve on their own.

Common triggers include:

- Excitement
- Pulling on a leash
- Allergies
- Irritants
- Drinking or eating too quickly

If episodes become frequent or severe, consult your veterinarian.

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## Heat and Breathing Problems

Because pugs already work harder to move air through their airways, heat can quickly become dangerous.

### Warning Signs of Overheating

- Heavy panting
- Thick saliva
- Bright red gums
- Weakness
- Vomiting
- Collapse

Heat stroke is a medical emergency.

If you suspect overheating:

1. Move your pug to a cool area immediately.
  2. Offer small amounts of water.
  3. Use cool (not ice-cold) water on the body.
  4. Seek veterinary care immediately.
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## Weight Matters

Excess weight places additional strain on the respiratory system.

Overweight pugs often experience:

- Increased breathing effort
- Reduced exercise tolerance
- Greater risk of overheating
- Worsening BOAS symptoms

Maintaining a healthy body condition is one of the most effective ways to improve breathing comfort.

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## Exercise Tips for Pugs

Exercise is important, but it should be adjusted to your pug's individual abilities.

### Recommended:

- ✓ Short walks
- ✓ Indoor play
- ✓ Mental enrichment activities
- ✓ Exercise during cooler parts of the day

### Avoid:

- ✗ Running long distances

- X Strenuous activity in hot weather
- X Exercising during peak heat and humidity
- X Activities that cause prolonged heavy panting

Remember: many pugs will keep going even when they are becoming overheated or exhausted. It is up to us to recognize when they need a break.

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## **Harnesses vs. Collars**

Many veterinarians recommend using a harness rather than a neck collar for pugs.

Harnesses:

- Reduce pressure on the airway
- Improve comfort during walks
- May decrease coughing or gagging
- Help protect the neck and trachea

A properly fitted harness can make a noticeable difference for some dogs.

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## **When Surgery May Help**

Some pugs with significant airway obstruction benefit from corrective surgery.

Common procedures may address:

- Narrow nostrils
- Elongated soft palate
- Other airway abnormalities

Not every pug requires surgery, but dogs experiencing substantial breathing difficulty may benefit from evaluation by a veterinarian familiar with brachycephalic breeds.

Early intervention often leads to better long-term outcomes.

## Emergency Warning Signs

Seek immediate veterinary care if your pug:

- ❗ Cannot catch their breath
- ❗ Has blue, gray, or very pale gums
- ❗ Collapses or faints
- ❗ Experiences severe respiratory distress
- ❗ Shows signs of heat stroke
- ❗ Has sudden worsening of breathing

These situations should always be treated as emergencies.

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## Living Well With a Pug

Many pugs with mild airway issues live long, happy lives with proper management.

The keys to success are:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Avoiding overheating
- Using appropriate exercise
- Monitoring for changes
- Seeking veterinary care when concerns arise

By understanding your pug's unique respiratory needs, you can help them breathe easier and enjoy a safer, healthier life.

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### **Pug Rescue of Florida & Georgia**

*Helping pugs breathe easier through education, prevention, and compassionate care.*