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TODAY OUR BREED EXPERT Carol Price looks at how can you help secure the longest and healthiest life for your dog

HOW LONG DO COLLIES LIVE?– AND 7 GOLDEN RULES TO HELP THEM LIVE LONGER AND MORE ACTIVE LIVES

You may often hear differing opinions on what the ‘typical’ lifespan of a Border collie is. Commonly it is around 12-15 years, but many dogs can live to 16, 17 or even more. At the heart of the difference can lie so many different factors, both genetic and environmental, but of course it is not just how long a life a dog lives that matters most, but the quality of the life they live, especially as they get older.

Sometimes dogs who live shorter lives are just plain unlucky. However, there is also much any owner can do to increase the chances of their dogs living longer, healthier and more active lives, through following these 7 golden rules:

1. ALWAYS GET YOUR DOG FROM HEALTH SCREENED STOCK. In the days before modern DNA screening, the most standard physical health screens undertaken on BC breeding stock were hip scoring and eye testing, as well as puppies tested for conditions like Collie Eye Anomaly via a physical eye exam. It was also that much harder to know what conditions breeding dogs may be carrying – including potentially fatal ones for their offspring – if they were not affected by these themselves. But today, testing breeding dogs to see if they are carriers for a wide range of breed-related inherited disorders has never been simpler, via standard ‘packages’ of DNA screens offered by many laboratories. Here is a link to a past post I did on important DNA tests that can now be done on breeding dogs: <https://www.facebook.com/.../a.132270815.../531932998382473/>

2. CHECK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DOG’S LEVEL OF INBREEDING. The higher level of inbreeding found in some Border collie lines today can be truly frightening, given the now well recognised link between the closer inbreeding in dogs, and a greater risk of inherited health or temperamental disorders. Ideally you want a dog to have a COI (Coefficient of Inbreeding) of less than 10%. If you are getting a pedigree BC, a breeder should tell you what the COI is of their litter, and if they do not know what it is, that would worry me. Alternatively you can often get this information through your relevant Kennel Club or other breed organisation. Or the huge breed database run by Anadune.com Though you first have to become a member of this database to access it.

A lower level of inbreeding may not be a more solid guarantee of a healthier or longer lived dog, but it is certainly the best start. Knowledge gained from such databases, into the background of any puppy or litter you are interested in, before you even view it, can also just be so helpful.

Only recently for instance I saw a pedigree litter advertised whose inbreeding ratio was nearly 20% (or more than double the recommended maximum) and both parents were carriers of the BCG (Border Collie Glaucoma) gene mutation, which can lead to dogs getting an earlier onset form of glaucoma. This is not only exceedingly painful for them, but can cause dogs to lose their sight, or even their eyes. All this vital information was readily available off a breed database. Yet any prospective new owner may never know or be told about it before they got their pup, unless they did their own research first.

3. GET THE EXERCISE BALANCE RIGHT. As highly energetic, driven and excitable dogs it can be easy for collies not to ‘know when to stop’ when it comes to daily exercise – especially when they are younger. And just because a collie is capable of running many miles, or doing athletic feats that

involve much jumping, twisting and landing again doesn't mean this will not take its toll on their bodies over time – in terms of injury or arthritis - if done more regularly or to excess.

Dogs live in the moment, and do not realise how long their bodies have to last them for, or what physical damage or deterioration may later ensue from what they are doing today. But we do. So we need to become better guardians of their bodies and ensure, daily, that they stay well within their physical comfort zones if we want them to live active lives for longer. Up to an hour's distance walking, morning and afternoon, is adequate for most adult collies, with the odd longer walk thrown in a few times a week if desired. If you intersperse this with regular short training sessions, to keep their brains sharp, they will be happy dogs. Too much non-stop chasing and jumping after balls or other chase toys, on the other hand, will not only put more significant strain on their bodies, but also fry their brains.

4. LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF STRESS AND TOXINS YOUR DOG IS EXPOSED TO.

Exposure to stress and environmental toxins is as bad for the health and immune systems of dogs as it is for people. So understand that the more stress your dog is exposed to daily – in the way of noise, movement, light and other forms physical or mental provocation or over-stimulation – the greater the ongoing risks to their health. Ensure your dog always has his/her own 'chill zone' where they can rest and wind down quietly, free of any source of noise, movement or brighter light or any other kind of external stimulation from others. Also collies are often at their most manic when they most need to rest and wind down in this way.

When it comes to environmental toxins, try to walk your dog away from busier roads to avoid traffic pollution, and also consider limiting the use of things like in-car or in-house air fresheners, more toxic –i.e. bleach based – floor cleaning solutions, or washing powders and fabric conditioners that contain a higher level of chemicals. Food colourings and other additives in complete diets or treats can also affect some collies more adversely. Flea and worming products can also be pretty toxic things. Sometimes they are essential in areas or countries where the risks of not using them regularly on a more preventative basis can be more serious, but I personally prefer only to ever use them when there is clearer evidence of my dogs having either fleas or worms. Others may prefer to use more natural alternatives to keep them at bay.

5. DO NOT LET YOUR COLLIE GET FAT! Nothing makes me sadder than to see a fat Border collie; the ultimate athlete of the dog world, struggling under a mountain of excess weight. As we totally control what our dogs eat, we must ensure this never happens, as every extra pound of weight our dog carries places excess strain on their hearts, joints and breathing and opens them up to a far higher risk of other illnesses, including diabetes and cancer. If you cannot easily feel your dog's ribs when you run your hands along his or her sides, and push down lightly, the chances are they are overweight. If in doubt ask your vet.

6. LOOK AFTER YOUR DOG'S TEETH. Poor dental health and hygiene can not only cause dogs much pain, but also lead to other problems including heart or kidney problems and blood infections. Plus poor appetite as eating hurts them so much. Regularly checking on your dog's teeth, and also cleaning them regularly to remove tartar, can therefore give them much happier and healthier lives longer term. NOTE: Here is a past feature I did on this subject:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=536248825209326&set=a.459541629546713>

7. DO REGULAR ALL OVER HEALTH CHECKS. A lot of painful or more serious health issues in collies could be better treated, or even cured, through being spotted far earlier. So get into the habit of checking your dog out all over, at least once a week. Feel all over the body for any new lumps or

bumps, check joints for any swelling or heat, ensure nails are kept short, check eyes, ears and mouth for any type of foreign body, soreness or infection. Also ask yourself, is my dog eating less or drinking more, or losing weight, or having more persistent bouts of diarrhoea/vomiting, or just not behaving like their normal selves? Any or all of these early signs could signify something more amiss with their health. Especially if they go on for some time. So again check them out with your vet if you have any doubt.

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