

An Odd Sign of Heart Disease You Won't Want to Ignore

This sign can mean many things, but in dogs, it can also be a sign of heart disease - especially when combined with these 7 other symptoms. Get the lowdown, and don't ignore it. Put time on your side.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In dogs, coughing can be a sign of several different problems, some more serious than others
- A common cause of coughing in dogs is something stuck in the throat. If the object isn't expelled by coughing, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian
- Other causes for a dog's cough can include a respiratory infection (kennel cough), pneumonia and heart disease
- A potentially serious cause of coughing, especially in small breeds, is a collapsing trachea
- Many dogs also "reverse sneeze," which is a respiratory event that sounds more like coughing or choking

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Much like humans, dogs cough for a lot of different reasons, some mostly harmless, and some quite serious. Generally speaking, if your dog only coughs once in a blue moon and it passes quickly, there's no cause for concern. But if your canine family member is coughing a lot or has intense coughing spells, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian. A persistent cough is a red flag that your dog probably has an underlying problem that needs to be addressed.

The following are some of the more common causes of canine coughs and what you should know about them.

6 Common Causes of Coughing in Dogs

1. **Foreign object lodged in the throat** — A cough that grows suddenly violent or sounds more like gagging, especially when accompanied by lip licking or attempts to swallow, could be a sign your dog has a sore throat or something stuck in her throat.

If she's outside when she begins coughing or has just come in from outdoors, she may have swallowed or inhaled a grass seed or other foreign object and it has become wedged in her throat. If she can't seem to cough up whatever it is, it's time to make an appointment with your veterinarian to prevent a potential infection or even pneumonia.

2. **Reverse sneezing** — Reverse sneezing is a common condition in small breed dogs and also brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds. While a reverse sneeze is not a cough, the sound can be mistaken for coughing or choking. Reverse sneezing is caused by a spasm of the throat and soft palate that is triggered by an irritant, which can

include simple excitement, exercise, a collar that's too tight, pollen or even a sudden change in temperature.

In a regular sneeze, air is pushed out through the nose. In a reverse sneeze, air is instead pulled rapidly and noisily in through the nose. The sound of a reverse sneeze can be upsetting, and many dog parents wonder if their pet is choking or having an asthma attack. Some dogs who reverse sneeze also tend to stand with elbows spread apart, head extended or back and eyes bulging.

Most cases of reverse sneezing don't require treatment. However, it's a good idea to keep track of when the episodes occur so you can determine what the probable triggers are and try to avoid them. If the sneezing becomes chronic or episodes become more frequent or longer in duration, it's a good idea to make an appointment with your veterinarian to rule out other potential health problems.

3. **Kennel cough** — A sudden persistent cough in an otherwise healthy dog is often due to kennel cough or another similar viral or bacterial infection. These infections tend to produce deep, dry hacking coughs, sneezing, snorting, gagging and in some cases, vomiting.

There can also be coughing "fits" or spasms if the dog becomes excited or while exercising. If your dog has recently been in contact with other dogs, he may have contracted a kennel cough infection. Symptoms usually appear from two to 14 days after exposure, last between 10 and 20 days, and can recur during periods of stress.

Most of these infections are mild and resolve without medical intervention. Many veterinarians immediately prescribe antibiotics, but I absolutely do not agree with that approach. I prefer to let a dog's body heal itself naturally, as long as he's otherwise healthy.

Complete recovery from kennel cough can take up to three weeks in healthy dogs, and twice as long in older pets and those with underlying immunosuppressive conditions. Puppies can also take a bit longer to recover.

Since a serious episode of kennel cough can result in pneumonia, if your dog doesn't start to improve on his own with the support of nontoxic remedies (such as nosodes, slippery elm bark, Echinacea, goldenseal and olive leaf), or if the cough becomes progressively worse, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian to be on the safe side.

4. **Pneumonia** — If your dog's cough sounds wet or is productive, it could be the result of a buildup of fluid in the lungs. Fluid or phlegm in the lungs is a red flag for pneumonia, which can have a variety of causes. Other symptoms include loss of appetite, weight loss, fever, lethargy and difficulty breathing.

Bacterial pneumonia is caused by a pathogen, and there are several organisms that can result in infection. Typically your dog will require antimicrobial drugs, rest, immune support and specific supportive therapies. Fungal pneumonia is the result of a deep fungal lung infection, and is more difficult to treat. Since many dogs don't respond to anti-fungal drugs, the precise treatment for fungal pneumonia will depend on what type of fungus has caused the infection.

I recommend you ask your veterinarian about inhalation therapy, which is one of the most effective, direct ways to treat these types of lung infections. Another type of pneumonia is aspiration pneumonia, also called inhalation pneumonia. This is a condition in which the lungs become inflamed and infected as the result of breathing in a foreign substance like vomit, regurgitated gastric acid or food.

Aspiration pneumonia is life threatening, and the prognosis for most dogs with the condition is poor, so the goal should always be prevention. If you suspect your dog has aspirated something, it's important to get her to your veterinarian or an emergency animal clinic right away.

5. **Collapsing trachea** — A recurrent, episodic cough that sounds like a goose honk can be a sign of a collapsing trachea — especially if your dog is a small breed. Tracheal collapse is a chronic, progressive disease that can be either congenital or acquired. Dogs with the condition also typically show signs of exercise intolerance, respiratory distress and gagging while eating or drinking.

Treatment options for a collapsing trachea include medical management, which works for about 70 percent of dogs with a mild form of the condition. More serious cases often require highly specialized surgery. Cartilage building supplements are also given to maintain the integrity of tracheal cartilage.

6. **Heart disease** — Coughing is unfortunately also a symptom of heart disease in dogs. Other signs include a bluish color to the tongue, loss of appetite, fatigue, weakness, decreased exercise endurance, a too-fast or too-slow heartbeat and difficulty breathing. If your dog has been diagnosed with a heart condition and coughs mainly while he's resting, lying down or at night, it could be a sign the disease is progressing.

Treatment of heart disease in dogs depends on a variety of factors including the severity of the problem, the age and health of the animal, cost of treatment and other considerations. A visit to a board-certified veterinary cardiologist can provide more information about the severity of your dog's condition.

There are a variety of natural therapies that can support a weakened cardiovascular system, so consult your holistic veterinarian for the best options for your pet's individual situation.

Other conditions that can cause coughing in your dog include chronic bronchitis, heartworm disease and some types of cancer. If your dog's cough doesn't resolve quickly on its own, it should be investigated, and the sooner you make an appointment with your veterinarian, the better your pet's chances for either a full recovery or a well-managed condition.

Sources and References

[VetStreet November 13, 2013](#)
