

New Procedure Brings Life to America's Most Popular Breed

This breed of dog may be the most popular in the US, but they can be at higher risk for as many as 20 common health problems, including some that are life-threatening. Now there's a minimally invasive outpatient procedure that can significantly improve their quality of life.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Boaz Man, a veterinarian in Boca Raton, FL, is using a non-invasive laser procedure to improve the breathing ability and quality of life of French Bulldogs, an “extreme” brachycephalic (flat-faced) breed
- Man and many other veterinarians believe better breeding is the ultimate answer to address the significant health issues of Frenchies and other brachys; we all share a responsibility to improve the health and lives of these dogs
- For years, too many brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs have been bred not for good health and positive behavioral traits, but simply to create extremes in physical appearance
- Studies show that in the U.K., the hugely popular French Bulldog is more likely to be diagnosed with 20 common, serious health disorders than other dog breeds; in addition, nearly three-quarters of very young Frenchies have at least one diagnosed health problem
- Thankfully, the U.K.'s Kennel Club has recently stepped up to the plate, modifying the Frenchie breed standard to move further away from elements of extreme conformation with evidence of health ill-effects

French Bulldogs are the most popular breed in the U.S. according to the American Kennel Club (AKC),¹ despite the significant health issues that go together with brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs. The sad reality is that Frenchies, along with Pugs and Bulldogs, are over 10 times more likely to suffer from life-threatening respiratory issues than any other breed.²

“People love to say, 'Oh it's so cute how he is when he does this little snoring or grunt noises and he's hacking like a little pig', but it's not funny and it's not cute; it means they are having a problem breathing,” Dr. Boaz Man, a veterinarian in Boca Raton, FL, told ABC25 WPBF News. “Unfortunately, Frenchies fall into a category of extreme brachycephalic breed, which means not only does he have a flat face, but it is extreme.”³

Laser Procedure Alleviates Respiratory Distress

Thankfully, Man is using a simple procedure to help dogs like French Bulldog Merci — who was recently rushed to an emergency animal clinic for **heatstroke** — breathe better. The laser procedure is minimally invasive, and no stitches or “cone of shame” are required.

“It is an outpatient procedure; they come in that morning and go home that night,” says Man. “They start breathing pretty soon after the procedure. The benefit of using a carbon dioxide laser is we don't have the bleeding that usually takes place with a scalpel blade.”

The laser is used to open the nostrils and remove excess tissue from the windpipe. "It's not only the nose that has to be fixed, it is something called an elongated soft palate, so that is creating an obstruction," Man explains.

Merci's owner noticed an immediate difference in her dog after the procedure. He was back to himself, taking mile-long walks with her without his stroller. Man says he understands why French Bulldogs are so popular:

"We need to do a better job of breeding them for better features," he says. "That is so important because we have a responsibility as pet parents to make sure they have the best quality of life possible."

U.K. Frenchies at Higher Risk for 20 Common Health Problems

French Bulldogs in the U.S. aren't alone in their misery. A recent U.K. study found that Frenchies are more likely to be diagnosed with 20 common, serious health disorders than other dog breeds.⁴ Due to the increasingly abnormal construction of their heads and muzzles, these dogs frequently have narrowed nostrils, brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome, ear discharge, skin fold dermatitis, and difficulty giving birth.

In a bit of good news, the study authors found that Frenchies are less likely to acquire or be diagnosed with 11 out of 43 specific disorders when compared to other breeds, including obesity, lameness, and undesirable behaviors. This fact, according to the BBC's Science Focus magazine, "suggests the breed has the potential to move towards a healthier profile over time, with researchers proposing a move towards breeding for more moderate traits."⁵

*"Selectively breeding away from the high-risk physical features of the breed, could improve the overall health of the French Bulldog, researchers say. This could include moving away from shorter muzzles and skin folds, as well as lessening the risks of breathing issues associated with the typical shorter muzzle and flat head of the breed."*⁶

For the study, the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) researchers examined records from veterinary practices across the U.K. involving 2,781 French Bulldogs and 21,850 other dog breeds.

U.K. Kennel Club Updates French Bulldog Breed Standard

According to study coauthor and Senior Lecturer at the RVC, Dr. Dan O'Neill:

"Achieving meaningful changes to the typical look of French Bulldogs over time requires buy-in from breeders and kennel clubs who publish breeding standards, but the biggest responsibility lies with owners who ultimately can demand dogs with more moderate features."

*"The Kennel Club has recently updated the breed standard for the French Bulldog to move further away from elements of extreme conformation with evidence of health ill-effects. This is a very positive step to prioritize the health of dogs over human desires for how these dogs look and we must now continue this evolution of the breed towards a more moderate conformation."*⁷

Study: Most Frenchies Develop Health Problems Early in Life

In 2018, some of the same RVC researchers published the U.K.'s largest-to-date study of over 2,200 French Bulldogs.⁸ For their study, the researchers analyzed records gathered from over 300 U.K. veterinary clinics. The median age of the dogs studied was 1.3 years.

They found that over a one-year period (which was the first year of life for many of the dogs), 72.4% had at least one recorded disorder. The most common health issues were ear infections, **diarrhea**, and conjunctivitis (inflammation of the surface of the eye). The researchers also noted the breed is particularly prone to three conditions commonly seen in all flat-faced breeds: skin fold dermatitis, **cherry eye**, and brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome.

The study also revealed that male Frenchies were much more prone to health problems. According to lead study author O'Neill:

*"One of the interesting findings from our research is that male French Bulldogs appear to be less healthy than females. Males were more likely to get 8 of the 26 most common health problems while there were no issues that females were more likely to get than males."*⁹

The researchers believed the earlier study may have underestimated the true number of Frenchies with health problems, since the records they analyzed were only for dogs who saw a veterinarian.

It's very likely many or most of the studied dogs were sicker than similarly affected dogs whose conditions didn't yet warrant a trip to the vet. In addition, the dogs in the study were quite young, and health problems often don't show up or are relatively mild until a dog reaches maturity.

The Frenchie's Distinctive Look Is a Blessing and a Curse

The distinctive appearance of the French Bulldog (and other brachy breeds), with their short muzzles and wide, prominent eyes, is probably one of the biggest reasons for their popularity. Unfortunately, it's these very characteristics that also increase the risk for health problems.

According to O'Neill, U.K. pet parents with French Bulldogs frequently deal with unexpectedly high veterinary bills because so many of the dogs have health issues.

"As well as the health risks associated with their extreme physical features, the public's insatiable demand for French Bulldog puppies is fueling a hugely profitable market for unscrupulous dealers and breeders," O'Neill told the Telegraph.

*"Many puppies are farmed in very low welfare conditions, often outside of the U.K., and then passed off as healthy happy U.K.-bred puppies. This can contribute to many later behavioral problems, such as aggression."*¹⁰

O'Neill advises potential pet parents to do careful research on the background of the puppy they're considering, and preferably do business only with members of the Kennel Club's Assured Breeder Scheme, which "... promotes good breeding practice and aims to work together with breeders and buyers to force irresponsible breeders, or puppy farmers, out of business."¹¹

How to Assess Dog Breeders

If you have your heart set on purchasing a **purebred** pup, you need to spend A LOT of time doing your homework; you owe it to yourself and your future furry family member to know in your heart you're buying a genetically resilient, healthy puppy. I strongly encourage you to try to buy from a breeder focused on improving the health of their breed by intentionally pairing the genetics of the sire with the dam.

Make sure to check his or her background and references. Review the sales contract closely. A reputable breeder will want to meet and interview anyone interested in buying a puppy, as well as be proud to show you the parents, their living environment, and their medical records, including genetic testing results. Transparent breeders will be happy to discuss lineage history, and what they're doing to intentionally create the next generation of healthier puppies. That's why you won't find responsible breeders selling to pet stores; they don't know who their buyers are.

Your prospective breeder should offer lots of information about their early socialization protocols before you ask, but make sure it's one of the first questions covered as it's one of the most important factors influencing your dog's personality and ability to cope with stress, years down the road. Click [here](#) to see a complete list of questions you should ask breeders prior to saying "yes" to a purebred animal.

Always insist on seeing the breeder's facility. Breeders may offer a "virtual tour" via puppy cams, but transparent breeders will not make any excuses for why they can't or won't show you where the dogs live. You want to see for yourself the conditions in which your puppy was born and raised. I would also insist on meeting the parents (the mother dog, at a minimum). If the breeder won't show you the dogs' living conditions, be suspicious. Additional resources:

- [**Good Dog**](#) connects screened breeders with informed buyers
- [**PupQuest**](#) provides information on how to discern disreputable breeders
- [**How to Find a Responsible Dog Breeder**](#) (Humane Society of the United States)
- [**Finding a Good Dog Breeder**](#) (Dogtime.com)
- [**List of breeders who feed raw and give minimal vaccines**](#)

Sources and References

¹ [AKC](#)

^{2,3} [ABC25 WPBF News, May 11, 2023](#)

⁴ [O'Neill, D.G. et al. Canine Medicine and Genetics volume 8, Article number: 13 \(2021\).](#)

^{5,6,7} [Science Focus, December 16, 2021](#)

⁸ [Canine Genetics and Epidemiology, 2018, 5:3](#)

⁹ [Science Daily, May 2, 2018](#)

¹⁰ [The Telegraph, May 3, 2018](#)

¹¹ [The Kennel Club](#)
