The MYGERMANSHEPHERD Health Manual

The 31 Most Common German Shepherd Ailments and Treatments AT A GLANCE

Tim Carter
Important Introductory Notes to The MYGERMANSHEPHERD Health Manual

1. Dehydration
2. Hip Dysplasia (Hip Deformity)
3. Elbow Dysplasia (Elbow Deformity)
4. Bloat or Gastric Torsion
5. Digestive Disorder (Gastroenteritis, Pancreatitis, etc)
6. Anal Infection (Perianal Fistulas or Anal Furunculosis)
7. Panosteitis (Bone Disease)
8. Arthritis (Degenerative Joint Disease)
9. Ear Infection (Canker or Otitis Externa)
10. Eye Infection (Conjunctivitis, Chronic Mucocutaneous Candidiasis etc)
11. Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation (Periodontitis, Gingivitis, etc)
12. Paw Thickening (Interdigital Cysts, Pyoderma, and Granuloma)
13. Hind Leg Weakness (Posterior Paresis, Paralysis)
14. Blood Disorder (von Willebrand's Disease)
15. Lumbosacral Stenosis (Cauda Equina Syndrome)

The front cover image is a screen copy of a precious and beautiful German Shepherd Art Print - see here for more like that
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Bacterial Skin Infection (Dermatitis or Hot Spots)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Immune System Disorder (Hypothyroidism)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Epilepsy</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Skin Allergies</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Tumor (Malignant Neoplasm or Hemangiosarcoma)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Non-Infectious Eye Problems</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Diarrhea</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Degenerative Myelopathy (Degeneration of the Spinal Cord)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Heart Muscle Disease (DCM, SAS, Heartworm)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Obesity</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Bladder Infection (Urinary Tract Infection or Cystitis)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Soft Tissue Trauma (Soft Tissue Damage)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Diabetes</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Vomiting</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Kidney Failure (Chronic Renal Failure or CRF)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Reading</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Important Introductory Notes to
The MYGERMANSHEPHERD Health Manual

1) The MYGERMANSHEPHERD Health Manual is a unique collection of the 31 most common German Shepherd ailments, warning signs, and treatments. If you ask “Why 31, not 30?”, I say “Why make it an even number where it isn’t?”. There are of course more than 31 German Shepherd ailments, but the 31 ailments in this manual seem to be the most common ones – therefore the subtitle The 31 Most Common German Shepherd Ailments and Treatments AT A GLANCE.

2) To have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd, you must know of the most common German Shepherd ailments, typical warning signs, and treatments. Only when you have a basic understanding of all of these areas, you will know how to keep your GSD healthy and happy – and therefore yourself too (and what the consequences may be if you don’t). That’s what makes The MYGERMANSHEPHERD Health Manual so crucial for every German Shepherd owner and handler.

3) With every ailment, you decide yourself at what point you visit a vet. Probably you neither want to be your vet’s best customer to the extent that your vet thinks you are hysteric, nor you want to be hitting the news as the “cruel dog owner who lets own dog die”. Your benefit is that, within a few months of reading this manual you will know your dog so well that you get a feeling for when you should better visit the vet, and when the ailment is temporary and will heal itself with a lot of rest. This manual – or anyone else’s advice – can only give you additional (impartial) information. Like with your child or yourself, ultimately you (and your wallet) will determine the course of action.

4) The warning signs of many ailments can easily be misinterpreted, and some ailments do not show warning signs at all. Therefore it is important that you take your German Shepherd to the vet for a checkup regularly, even if everything seems fine. Ideal of course is that every time you visit the vet, they conclude “Your dog is in top health”. When you consider how many years represent a dog year, and that you yourself can communicate your ailments and simply drive to a doctor, you will appreciate that a half-yearly vet visit is not a “waste of money”. At least a yearly vet visit should be an absolute must if your dog’s wellbeing means anything to you.

5) As you will notice, many ailments may be indicated by the same symptoms (e.g. listlessness, lethargy, loss of appetite etc). Therefore you will generally need to consider the concurrent appearance of several symptoms, and also put them in...
relation to lifestyle changes, dietary changes, exercise changes, environmental factors etc. In other words, you will need to apply some developed common sense.

Only an experienced vet can make the right examinations, determine the real cause of any symptoms, and decide on a suitable treatment.

However, just like with human doctors, qualification and experience does not always necessarily mean that a vet will enquire of and identify all relevant warning signs, perform the right examinations, correctly identify the ailment, and prescribe the most appropriate treatment.

A vet, like any other professional, ultimately has economic constraints too (like you). For some, these are more on the forefront of their minds, for others more the backburner. But note that every vet is inundated with samples, trial agreements, and turnover incentives from drug companies, food companies, research institutes (often funded by the prior), etc.

The prior paragraph alone fully explains on its own why X-rays etc are done so frequently (the equipment need to be paid for), antibiotics are prescribed so frequently (it’s easier and quicker than searching for the real cause and specific treatment of an ailment), medicaments in general are prescribed so frequently (they pay incentives while alternative, natural treatments pay nothing), etc. To apply common sense does help a lot in life!

Therefore it is crucial that you understand a bit of the ailments, warning signs, and treatments too. Of course, the vet should ultimately have the last word. However, if you have enough life experience you will know that in a not insignificant number of cases one vet’s diagnosis and recommended treatment differ from those of the next vet. If you had a very sick child, you would probably study the ailment a bit yourself too, and not just blindly accept everything the doc suggests – in fact, you might then want to visit a second and third doc.

As much as the vet will often try to argue in favor of machine-use examinations, prescription of antibiotics and other blanket medications, you should aim to avoid 1) all which puts unproportional strain on your German Shepherd, and 2) all which is likely to have side effects that will require further treatments (and so on).

For example, the administration of antibiotics, corticosteroids, glucocorticoids, etc make certain future chronic ailments not just possible but likely – these medications incur for example Bloat (4), Digestive Disorder (5), Bladder Infection (26), Immune System Disorder (17), etc. Paradoxically however, there is a blanket recommendation to treat most infections with antibiotics - and then the consequent ailments with antibiotics again (and so on).

!This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!

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When you have your vet's diagnosis, always consider their suggested treatment carefully.

From experience spanning many decades (and total independence from drug companies etc) I can assure you that for every ailment there exist almost always natural remedies that have zero side effects (at least in the longer term) and are more effective, and are therefore the more appropriate treatment too. It's just a question of getting to know those remedies (and being indifferent to the incentives of the pharmaceutical sector). This is where you come in, and sources like MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org and this Health Manual.

Antibiotics, for example, should only be administered to treat life-threatening conditions or conditions that materially impact the quality of life in the longer term, and where all other remedies have been exhausted. The latter can never be the case upon the first vet visit!

If you aim to avoid 1) all which puts unproportional strain on your German Shepherd, and 2) all which is likely to have side effects that will require further treatments, the vet and you will meet somewhere in the middle - and this should benefit your GSD long-term. Conversely, if you simply nod through everything your vet suggests (as so many people do in life, in general), you wouldn't play the role of your dog's advocate but merely play the key role in your vet's economic function. Which role do you prefer?

6) Also note that if you administer your GSD any prescribed antibiotics, then although your dog's symptoms should usually resolve within say 2 or 3 days, you must administer the entire prescribed course of treatment (usually 10 or 14 days of antibiotics). Incomplete treatment may not only lead to (a quite immediate) infection recurrence but – more worryingly – future bacterial resistance. This would mean that during future treatment this antibiotic pedigree may not help at all. Most worryingly, it would not just fail to help your GSD, but over time fail to help any GSD, because most resistance is transmissive.

7) Aim to choose a holistic vet – one who is well-versed in treating your German Shepherd overall, not just focusing on the symptoms of the single condition at this time. A holistic vet does not mean a homeopathic vet, a holistic vet is someone whose passion is to consider the connectivity of all ailments and treatments over the entire lifetime of your dog (holistic is an attitude, not a study).

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Such a vet is likely to be more expensive per individual session (because it is almost impossible for them to obtain perks), but cheaper in the long-term (because consequent ailments are rather rare).

8) Avoid discussing with your vet that you've "read up on an ailment on the internet". There is so much nonsense on the net these days that your vet may rightfully respond with criticism. - Just like you should not blindly accept everything either that the vet suggests (see the common sense advice in Note 5 above).

9) Make sure that you never apply any ointment, lotion, powder, spray, etc close to the eyes, never in the ears, and never in the mouth or nose - unless it is specifically and clearly meant for this body opening! If this happens nonetheless, rinse well under running water, and if serious visit a vet straight away.

10) Never administer your German Shepherd two medicaments at the same time, unless prescribed as such by the vet. "At the same time" does not just mean "the same minute" but can actually mean "within the same 30 or 60 day period"! This is because various drugs constitute a powerful impact on body functions or reactions that may interact with those of the other drug in a way that could even lead to death.

Since you cannot know which drugs are dangerous if taken "together", you should seek the vet's authorization in such case (although, note that sometimes not even the vet may know).

You can however generally administer a medicament and a natural food supplement at the same time without having to fear severe complications. Mark the word natural, as many food supplements are not entirely natural but mixed with chemical substances otherwise found in medicaments.

If you only acquire products from a source in a country with strict food and drug regulations and enforcement, then you should generally be able to rely on the ingredient list reproduced on the product.

11) If your German Shepherd is likely to meet other dogs (in a dog park, kennel, or wherever) that may possibly be infected (by any disease really), consider to have your GSD vaccinated against the most dangerous diseases. In some states and countries various vaccinations are legally required anyway.

Do not vaccinate your German Shepherd unnecessarilly against highly unlikely diseases though. Every vaccination bears a risk in itself, and it makes no sense to vaccinate your dog "against every disease on earth". Your local vet should know very well a) which vaccinations are legally required for your dog, and b) which vaccinations are "good to do anyway" in your geography. Consider the vet's suggestions carefully.

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Note that vaccinations \textit{must always} be done by a \textit{professional vet}, because vaccinations must \textit{match} your dog - or they may a) be ineffective, b) make your dog ill, or c) kill your dog! Do \textit{not} attempt to use (cheaper) over the counter (OTC) vaccines or backyard vets! Save money on other things, never on \textit{vaccines}.

\begin{itemize}
\item Once you are subscribed to the free \textbf{MYGERMANSHEPHERD PERIODICAL} you will get many more tips regularly.
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!
\end{itemize}

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The overall goal of MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org:
To help you to have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd!

In your firewall, make sure that you can click the links in this pdf document, so that your browser will open up the linked pages. The links point either to content on MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org, or to the best remedies in your geographical area.

This means we make use of geotargeting, just like Google do. However, at the time of writing we have yet only covered German Shepherd owners in the USA, Canada, and the UK.

If you land on a seemingly unsuitable page, it means that there was no suitable remedy available in your country (most dog products are developed in the USA). Please send any questions here.

Note that any linked products have been thoroughly researched and compared. The links point to the remedies that are the most suitable or the most effective, and have the least side effects. Experience is everything.

Similarly, often a certain supplier has shown to be the better choice because they offer a bonus to you, or a perk like lower shipping cost.

In no case was this decision subject to receiving a better commission for us: We know very well that we can only help you to have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd if we always focus on your benefit, not ours.

You can easily see this, because the majority of product links point to Amazon - although they give us the lowest sales commission: 4%. In other words, if you kindly use our link to buy an item of say 20 dollar, we would (hopefully) get 80 cent sales commission.

However, whether you hate them or love them, because of their huge market power, Amazon often have the best deal for you - and that’s why the majority of links point to them.

Nonetheless, the manufacturer itself may be the better choice if they offer some kind of bonus to you. Then we link to them. Example, at the time of writing: Ugodog with their dog potty and bonuses.

However, the market is always changing. Hence we welcome your feedback too if you know of a better remedy in your geography to avoid or treat a German Shepherd ailment.
1. Dehydration

Dehydration is a medical condition, not just thirst. Dehydration means that your dog has less fluid in its body than is required for health and wellbeing. Dehydration is a serious ailment because it will automatically lead to many related ailments, all of which put enormous strain on the health and wellbeing of your dog long-term, and some of which are even fatal.

Along with a loss of water, dehydration also involves a loss of crucial electrolytes – minerals such as sodium, chloride, potassium, etc.

Who suffers from Dehydration

Dehydration may well be the most common ailment for German Shepherds because this breed is so agile and has such a strong metabolism that it is simply not enough to serve a bowl of fresh water with each dog meal.

In addition, the hotter it is and/or the more exercise your dog does and/or the more stress it is suffering, the more fresh water you must supply.

Finally, fever and most ailments also contribute to the condition of dehydration, because the healing process consumes extra fluids.

Warning Signs

Typical warning signs of dehydration are:

- Dry, sticky gums
- Delay in capillary refill time - the time it takes for your dog’s gum to return to its normal color after you carefully press your finger against it exceeds 1 second
- Lack of skin elasticity
- Persistent panting
- Sunken eyes
- Too much or too little urination
- Lethargy
- Illness or injury increase the likelihood of dehydration because the healing process requires extra fluids and because you may think that your dog is too weak to drink now

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Avoiding and Treating Dehydration

To avoid Dehydration, always provide a large bowl of fresh water, day and night. Two bowls of fresh water during the night are better, in case your dog is awake and the increased metabolism requires more fluids. Do not think "If I restrict the amount of water intake of my dog, I don't need to walk my dog that often". With that logic, you could also argue "If I don't have a dog, I don't need to walk"!

If your dog can't relieve itself every three hours maximum when awake and after six hours when the metabolism is slowed down during sleep (and a puppy every hour), then you are asking for German Shepherd behavior problems, plus for ailments like Bladder Infection (see 26), Bloat (see 4), Digestive Disorder (see 5), Kidney Failure (see 30), etc all the way through to otherwise rare conditions such as liver disease, blindness, etc.

If you are not willing to or cannot take your dog at least for a brisk walk that often, you must provide a potty place on your premises or a sizable dog potty that is suitable for a German Shepherd.

Whenever you take your GSD on a hike, a run, or prolonged outdoor exercise, consider getting one of those useful dog backpacks and put a large bottle of water on each side. This type of dog backpack has four benefits:

- Your German Shepherd will carry its own water supply, not you
- You can be sure your dog will get fresh water, not contaminated water
- You can put lots of stuff in them, in addition to the water for your dog
- Crucially, the equal weight distribution on the sides and the harness-style straps hold this dog backpack in place, while most models annoy the dog as they move around the dog's body.

To treat Dehydration you do not necessarily need to take your dog to the vet - as cheap text copies on internet marketing sites suggest. If that were the case, the majority of the agile dogs with a strong metabolism would be at the vet every week!

So, better use your common sense: The first warning signs of dehydration are dry, sticky gums and a delay in capillary refill time. Therefore, every so often during the day you will make this observation and check, and when you get a positive result (meaning the gums are dry and sticky or the capillary refill time does exceed 1 second) you treat your dog for these first signs of dehydration: Make your GSD drink an entire bowl of fresh water to which you've added the recommended dosage of electrolytes to replace the crucial minerals lost during dehydration. Do not serve milk now.
If your German Shepherd does *not* empty the entire bowl of fresh water although you are mildly encouraging your dog for 10 minutes or so, then your GSD may have another underlying ailment that causes the Dehydration, and you should take your dog to the vet immediately.

Likewise, if you notice persistent panting or sunken eyes in your German Shepherd, then the problem is severe and you should take your dog to the vet immediately.

Conversely, too much or too little urination or lethargy are hard to judge because they depend on so many other factors. Therefore, these warning signs must be considered in combination with other warning signs - see the *Important Introductory Notes*, especially Note 5.

If the condition persists or is recurring somewhat regularly, again there is an underlying cause for the Dehydration, and you should take your German Shepherd to the vet for a full medical checkup. *Don't* wait for the next routine examination (which could be half a year away, see the *Important Introductory Notes*, especially Note 4). Take your GSD to the vet straight away.

Yes, this costs money, but having an ill German Shepherd or one with behavior problems may in future cost *much* more. In my personal point of view, a large, strong, and agile outdoor dog like the German Shepherd should always come with [dog health insurance and liability dog insurance](#) - regardless of any legal requirements (which only serve people who can't think for themselves). That's my personal view, and we have explained the reasons here.

### 2. Hip Dysplasia (Hip Deformity)

Hip Dysplasia is hereditary. Of all the hereditary ailments of German Shepherds, the most common probably still is Hip Dysplasia (but meanwhile less than 1 in 5 dogs is affected). It's painful for your dog, and it's frustrating for yourself too. It can become apparent in adult German Shepherds of any age, often as young as two years.

The disease is orthopaedic in nature and will lead to an abnormal formation of the hip, which then causes looseness in the joints and cartilage damage. The result is another disease, Arthritis (see 8). It can make movements of your GSD much tougher and painful too.

**Who Gets Hip Dysplasia**

Hip Dysplasia is a genetic disease that passes down through a specific lineage of dogs. If you have two loose hip dogs mate with each other, the result is often a Hip
Dysplasia stricken puppy. Of course, not all dogs with the disease suffer from it or show symptoms, so it can be hard to determine if your new puppy has a heredity even if its parents have been X-rayed and determined healthy.

There are some environmental factors too, including Obesity (see 25) and excessive proteins, vitamins and minerals in food - as is typical for enriched industrial dog food. Items and substances that are designed to make puppies grow faster have been shown to increase the risk of Hip Dysplasia and Arthritis (see 8) as well.

**Warning Signs**

Hip Dysplasia will be indicated by a drop in energy levels, difficulty in standing or moving and lameness in your dog’s back legs. Your German Shepherd will stop wanting to use stairs, especially when going up, and will rarely want to stand up on its back limbs or jump up on anything. German Shepherds with Hip Dysplasia will start hopping with their back legs when walking, and they will show signs of soreness when they lie down, especially after exercise.

If your German Shepherd shows any of these signs, regardless of its age, get it to the vet for an X-ray as soon as possible.

**Treating Hip Dysplasia**

The attempts to treat Hip Dysplasia vary depending on the severity of the ailment. The more conservative non-invasive treatments include weight loss, pain medication, the top joint health supplement Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM, the Back and Hip Support Brace, and physical therapy and basic exercise routines to work the hips.

**Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM** is a clinically researched, freely available joint health supplement with a well over a decade long track record. Vets frequently prescribe it to improve the dog’s mobility in cases of Hip Dysplasia, Elbow Dysplasia (see 3), and Arthritis (see 8). It may also help with Panosteitis (see 7), Hind Leg Weakness (see 13), and Lumbosacral Stenosis (see 15). It has *only positive reviews* from virtually every dog owner who tried it - which alone makes it an impressive remedy.

Other methods aim to salvage the degenerating hips before they get too worn out by the disease. For example the Bottoms-up Leash, the Walkabout Rear Harness, or the Walkin Lift Harness.

If the disease has grown to become severe, surgery may be indicated. This could mean that the vet can delay or stop the spread of Arthritis too (see 8).
The only real way to know which treatment is best for your German Shepherd when you notice the early warning signs, is to visit a vet and have the necessary X-ray and tests done to determine the existence and extent of Hip Dysplasia. The vet will then determine what works best to treat those particular issues.

In the final stages of Hip Dysplasia - other than putting the dog to sleep - there may be no other option than to provide your German Shepherd with the best dog wheelchair.

If the front legs and elbows are still strong, the fully adjustable and resalable standard Walkin’ Wheels will allow your dog to run around with its hind legs in the wheelchair - like thousands of dogs around the world are comfortably doing.

However, if your dog's front legs are weak too, then your only chance is to make the investment in a customized quad cart that can support all four legs. You will need to consider this carefully though - not only because of the cost, but because having to use a quad cart puts a lot of stress on your German Shepherd.

3. Elbow Dysplasia (Elbow Deformity)

Elbow Dysplasia is hereditary too. It is less common than Hip Dysplasia (see 2), but it is very painful too when it strikes your German Shepherd. Elbow Dysplasia appears to be independent of Hip Dysplasia. Elbow Dysplasia generally strikes later than Hip Dysplasia. Again, a consequent disease is Arthritis (see 8), but early diagnosis and adequate treatment may prevent the Arthritis.

Who Gets Elbow Dysplasia

Please see the information for Hip Dysplasia as it applies here as well. An additional environmental factor is extreme workout of a German Shepherd that has Elbow Dysplasia in its genes. You should still provide your GSD with challenging daily exercise though. 2 to 4 hours spread over the entire day are a good measure. This is of course in addition to walking your German Shepherd to relieve itself.

Warning Signs

Elbow Dysplasia also will be indicated by a drop in energy levels and severe difficulty in walking. Your German Shepherd will no longer be able to use stairs, jump over barriers, etc. In fact, German Shepherds with Elbow Dysplasia may not want to walk at all. The elbows may look sore, and if you touch them your dog may whine. If your GSD shows any of these signs, get it to the vet for an X-ray as soon as possible. The vet will then determine what works best to treat the particular issue.

This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!

However, to deal with minor dog health problems BEFORE they become major ones
**Treating Elbow Dysplasia**

Again, here applies what you read for Hip Dysplasia - in particular the administration of Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM or at least good pain medication. The Walkabout Front Harness may help to salvage the degenerating elbows before they get too worn out by the disease.

The difference in treatment options becomes more evident in the final stages of the disease: If your German Shepherd has a hind leg condition, eg due to Hip Dysplasia (see 2) or an injury, the Walkin' Wheels is a sensible solution that will allow your dog to run around fairly happily with the wheelchair attached. However, if your German Shepherd has a front leg condition, eg due to Elbow Dysplasia or an injury, you might find the corresponding front limb dog cart too stressful for your dog.

The front limb dog cart puts a similar level of stress on your dog as the quad cart. Hence, in such case you would need to think carefully whether the expected quality of life for your German Shepherd is worth the stress - and the investment, since both these carts need to be customized, which means they can hardly be resold.

The number of hereditary health issues of German Shepherds suggests that if you are looking for a German Shepherd puppy it is crucial to find a reputable German Shepherd breeder - one who cares about the breed and who has all breeding stock tested and cleared for various genetic ailments before breeding. Note that it is only by testing and breeding cleared German Shepherds that hereditary ailments can be brought under control. Therefore, please contribute your part too.

**4. Bloat or Gastric Torsion**

First, Gastric Torsion, or twisting of the stomach, is the (mostly fatal) end result of Bloat, and Bloat is not the occasional passing gas as you may have associated it with.

Bloat means distension of the stomach with gas. This happens as a result of a paralysis of the wall of the stomach, so that the gas which is produced in the stomach upon processing meals cannot escape.

The distension of the stomach with gas (Bloat) may or may not be followed by twisting of the stomach (Gastric Torsion). But if the stomach indeed is twisted, you have an emergency case: The dog is then likely to die within 1 or 2 hours. When the stomach is severely dilated and congested with gas, it will often rotate about an axis.

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in the plane of the esophagus. This occludes both the entrance to and the exit from the stomach, so that the gas which is produced in the stomach cannot escape, giving further rise to the distension. The stomach may even be deprived of blood, and the spleen is often also enlarged and twisted.

An affected dog may live up to 36 hours but many will die within one to two hours. The rapid development of this ailment is explained by the pressure of the enlarged stomach on the vena cava, the large vein which carries blood to the heart from the abdomen and hind legs. As a result of this pressure there is an inadequate amount of blood returning to the heart, so that it cannot function effectively as a pump, and therefore the blood pressure of the dog falls. This produces shock and rapid death.

Who Gets Bloat or Gastric Torsion

For anatomical reasons, large dogs like German Shepherds are most susceptible to Gastric Torsion, while any dog can contract Bloat. The initial paralysis of the wall of the stomach can have multiple causes, and there is no doubt that the administration of antibiotics and certain other medicaments is one such cause.

German Shepherds have a medium risk to contract Gastric Torsion (high risk are the Great Dane and Bloodhound). There does not appear to be any association with the sex or the age of the dog. Gastric Torsion has been reported in young adults as well as fully mature dogs. Even an otherwise healthy dog can contract Gastric Torsion suddenly after a large meal. There are no known tests of susceptibility either to Bloat or Gastric Torsion.

Warning Signs

Bloat has a sudden onset, usually within one to two hours of eating a large meal. The dog is first breathless and, if examined closely, the abdomen is excessively large.

The dog will stand, lie still, or move only with caution. It will generally pass feces and gas so that eventually the entire gut with the exception of the stomach has been emptied. There are often attempts at Vomiting (see 29), although these attempts are rarely successful if the stomach is already twisted (Gastric Torsion). When the stomach becomes grossly distended, there is severe difficulty in breathing (Dyspnea).

Avoiding and Treating Bloat and Gastric Torsion

This is a good time to stress our regular plea for healthy dog meals, regular meal times, and a consistent feeding routine - which we have explained as an essential part of House Training a Dog. Do not fall victim to the ancient myth of "one dog meal

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a day”. No matter what exercise regime you practice, you cannot possibly keep a large dog like the German Shepherd healthy if you provide all the food it needs in a single large meal. Use your common sense, not myths.

In fact, here probably more than with the other German Shepherd ailments, a planned regime of dog meals, meal times, feeding routine, and regular exercise is the best way to avoid Bloat and Gastric Torsion altogether. Even if it is hereditary too (which is unknown), two or possibly three smaller, healthy meals during the entire day that are balanced in nutrients, plus permanent supply of a bowl of fresh water, will make the occurrence of this fatal ailment unlikely, because there will be little gas production in the first place. In addition, regular exercise stimulates stomach and gut activity.

Another important factor in avoiding Bloat and hence also Gastric Torsion is that your German Shepherd does not gulp the food but instead eats slowly. This is extremely difficult to achieve with Dog House Training, and most Eat-Slow remedies are a waste of money. For example, the problem with Portion Pacers and the average Eat-Slow bowl is that your German Shepherd will quickly learn to remove the obstacle, to shift the food to an easier spot, or even to turn the bowl over.

Based on comparisons of all owner feedback, there exist only two types of Eat-Slow bowls that really make your dog eat much slower: The best Eat-Slow bowl is made of sturdy plastic, the second-best Eat-Slow bowl is made of heavier aluminium. Both these Eat-Slow bowls justify their name. The benefits of slower food intake:

- better digestion
- better absorption of the nutrients
- your dog feels full quicker
- reduced risk of Obesity (see 25)
- reduced Vomiting (see 29)
- reduced gas production (and passing gas)
- reduced risk of Bloat and Gastric Torsion!

Once Bloat does occur, treatment is difficult, and you don't know if Gastric Torsion is developing too. When you notice the last warning sign, difficulty in breathing, an emergency call to the vet would likely be too late. Therefore it's sensible to call the vet when you notice the initial warning signs mentioned above after a large meal.

If your dog cannot be treated immediately by a vet, you may at some point be forced to render first aid to your dog. However, there is no uniformly successful method to relieve the distension. Although a stomach tube can be passed, and this can be

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done by the owner, this does not help in cases with major twisting of the stomach since the entrance into the stomach is obstructed by the twist in the esophagus.

Some owners puncture the stomach with a large-bore needle so that the gas can escape. It is probably best to do this on the right side of the dog over the point of greatest distension. However, again, this is not always successful. The needle can become obstructed by stomach contents, and there may be a leakage of fluids and gas into the abdominal cavity with risk of Peritonitis (inflammation of the peritoneum).

Nonetheless, if your dog is severely affected and no vet in sight, you may have no choice but to attempt one of these methods to relieve the Bloat before the onset of Gastric Torsion.

5. Digestive Disorder (Gastroenteritis, Pancreatitis, etc)

Gastroenteritis is an inflammation of the stomach that will make your dog vomit (see 29) or cause Diarrhea (see 22). This is a natural body-reflex to get rid of indigestible foreign objects, substances and parasites.

Pancreatitis is an acute or chronic inflammation of the pancreas, causing leakage of the digestive enzymes produced in the pancreas. This is a life-threatening condition.

Who Gets Digestive Disorders

All dog breeds are susceptible to Digestive Disorders because they are scavengers - they ingest spoiled food and other substances that cause bacterial, viral or fungal infections. German Shepherds are not more susceptible to Digestive Disorders than other dog breeds. In fact, since GSDs are specifically receptive to a wide range of training, you can (and should) use your German Shepherd dog training to stop your dog from scavenging altogether.

Gastroenteritis generally is caused by an infection as a result of an improper diet. Certain medications can also cause Gastroenteritis, in particular Corticosteroids (given upon injury to the brain or spinal cord) and anti-cancer drugs. In addition, abdominal disorders like Pancreatitis and Peritonitis (inflammation of the peritoneum) and metabolic disorders like liver or kidney disease can cause Gastroenteritis too. Finally, food intolerance (to corn, wheat, etc) may cause Gastroenteritis.

Pancreatitis primarily affects dogs beyond 5 years of age, and more females than males. However, the highest risk have obese dogs (see 25), regardless of their age.

Warning Signs

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The warning signs of Gastroenteritis are Vomiting (see 29), Dehydration (see 1), Diarrhea (see 22), lethargy, lack of appetite, grumbling noises in the stomach, listlessness, or even blood in the stool. If you find blood in the stool it means that your GSD is bleeding internally and you should visit a vet immediately.

Unfortunately, although Pancreatitis is the *dangerous* Digestive Disorder, it does not have a specific pattern of symptoms, instead many are similar to those of Gastroenteritis and other ailments: Vomiting (see 29), loss of appetite, a hunched appearance because of abdominal pain, lethargy, fever, Diarrhea (see 22), depression, or Dehydration (see 1).

Actual diagnosis of Pancreatitis is via blood counts and performing a number of chemical tests to check for the enzymes emblematic of Pancreatitis. This can be done as a routine examination during the half-yearly vet visit.

**Avoiding and Treating Digestive Disorders**

The best chance to *avoid* Gastroenteritis is to train your German Shepherd not to scavenge, and to train yourself not to feed table scraps.

The most important *treatment* of Gastroenteritis is to keep your dog hydrated and to restore the *electrolytes* lost through Vomiting (see 29) and Diarrhea (see 22), because they are needed to supply nutrients to the body. Don't give food on the first day of Diarrhea, and then start with a mild diet based on rice. Never give milk during Diarrhea or Vomiting.

There are no set reasons for why a dog might develop Pancreatitis, but general causes are usually related to poor diet and Obesity (see 25). The best chance to *avoid* Pancreatitis is to avoid fatty dog meals - likely when you eat fatty meals too (during festive seasons), and to keep your German Shepherd slim and fit. Every fatty meal is a threat to the pancreas, such that it may suffer an acute failure and probably thereafter chronic failures.

More generally, *avoid* high fat - high protein - high calcium - high sodium diets. In addition, wherever the dog's body is able to self-regulate, *avoid* drugs (for example, with Gastroenteritis). In particular Corticosteroids (routinely administered upon injury to the brain or spinal cord) and Antibiotics (eg Sulphonamides and Tetracycline), but also for example Cholinesterase inhibitors in insecticides.

For the *treatment* of Pancreatitis you will need to visit the vet immediately, because it is a life-threatening condition. However, as mentioned above, this is particularly difficult here since there are no specific warning signs of Pancreatitis - another reason why half-yearly or at least yearly vet visits are advisable.
6. Anal Infection (Perianal Fistula or Anal Furunculosis)

Perianal Fistula or Anal Furunculosis is a chronic and painful lesion around the anus. They can form deep and draining ulcers.

Who Gets Anal Infections

Unfortunately, German Shepherds are the main breed to suffer Anal Infections - one study accounted for 84% of the dogs diagnosed. This may be due to the larger number of glands in the perianal area when compared to other breeds, or the way the tail is set and carried.

However, primarily male German Shepherds are affected, and mostly between the age of 5 to 8 years. Nonetheless, once your dog contracts an Anal Infection, it becomes almost always chronic in nature. This means that the standard treatment can get rid of this ailment for the moment, but it is recurring nonetheless.

Warning Signs

Observe if your German Shepherd frequently chews or licks the perianal area, or if your dog scoots the anal area over the ground. In either case, carefully lift your dog’s tail and see if there are any ulcers, bleeding, red or black spots, or foul-smelling discharge around the anal area. Note that simply lifting the tail may hurt your dog if the area is infected.

This visual diagnosis is already sufficient, however in addition your dog may show a clearly different potty routine and the looks of the stool may be different too. Some dogs will become lethargic and lose appetite and weight. Because of the discomfort and pain, you may notice a change in behavior of your dog too - potentially up to the point where you have to deal with German Shepherd aggression, even if your GSD was docile before this ailment occurred.

Avoiding and Treating Anal Infections

The warm, moist area around the anus and under the tail make an excellent environment for bacteria to multiply, up to the point of an Anal Infection. Hence it is sensible to avoid this by regularly cleansing the anus area of your German Shepherd with a strong antiseptic spray - ideally daily but at least every other day. You may also want to do this if you have a female GSD to help avoid that she might contract an Anal Infection at some point.

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You need not worry that daily antiseptic cleaning might harm your German Shepherd's delicate skin, but if you do you can afterwards apply a flimsy coating of ClearSkin-E Cream - which can work wonders on your dog's skin, as well as on your own. Make sure that you and the cloth won't touch the tube after you or the cloth have touched your dog's anal area. Always wash your hands thoroughly with an antiseptic lotion before you apply any care product to your dog, and afterwards again.

Once an Anal Infection occurs, treatment is difficult - as with all chronic diseases. If you notice it early and the condition is mild, you can attempt home treatment: Spray a strong antiseptic wound wash directly around your dog's anus area, three times a day. Continue with this treatment until at least one full week after the infection seems to have disappeared.

Whenever you cleanse the anus area before spraying the antiseptic wound wash, use a lint-free, clean cloth and move from the outer, yet seemingly unaffected areas, to the inner, clearly affected areas in one straight line. Then use a different piece of cloth and repeat, now moving on a different imaginary line. Repeat until you've covered the 360 degrees around and towards the anus. The direction of the movements during cleansing is crucial: Do not spread the bacteria from the clearly more affected area to the yet seemingly unaffected areas!

Do not use the same piece of cloth twice. Therefore, depending on the severity of the infection, you may need to use many pieces of lint-free cloth per cleansing session, hence a huge number of cloths over a three-week treatment period. After each session, burn the bunch of cloths (or dispose of them in a separate sealed bin bag). Do not wash and reuse or deposit them where a dog may nuzzle. Wash your hands thoroughly with an antiseptic lotion.

Conversely, if you feel that your dog's anus area looks bad, it probably is. Visit the vet straight away. However, some vets don't grasp the severity of an Anal Infection, and others simply prescribe their blanket treatment, antibiotics. If you feel that your vet doesn't take the Anal Infection as serious as it is, or if they suggest an unspecific and inappropriate treatment like antibiotics, visit another vet instead.

A final note: It should be obvious that your dog shouldn't be allowed on your bed or the couch. Now you have one more reason why this is so. Unless you have just cleansed the anus area with a strong antiseptic spray, your dog's anus area will be populated with very nasty bacteria - all the time, not just during an Anal Infection.

7. Panosteitis (Bone Disease)
Panosteitis is a skeletal problem that results in temporary lameness. The cause is not yet fully understood. It usually occurs between month 2 and 14. For your puppy this period is very painful. Imagine every bone in your body would hurt as if it explodes. The pain can come and go and lasts between two months and up to a year. This means that there are times of pain and times when your puppy seems to be fine. Eventually the condition will go away - treatment is not required.

Who Gets Panosteitis

Panosteitis primarily affects the German Shepherd breed, which is why it is believed to be hereditary. It affects male dogs more commonly than females.

In most cases, the worst pain lasts between one and two months but may persist in a cyclic nature for up to a year. Often one or the other front leg is affected first and then the problem tends to move around, making it appear that the lameness is shifting from leg to leg. There are often periods of improvement and worsening of the symptoms in a cyclic manner. This makes the evaluation of any treatment difficult since many dogs will spontaneously recover with or without treatment and then relapse.

Warning Signs

The symptom of Panosteitis is spontaneous lameness, usually between month 2 and 14. The presence of fever is supportive of the diagnosis. Since there is not a strong correlation between the amount of increased bone density seen on X-rays and the amount of pain, this ailment does sometimes present as sort of a mystery.

Treating Panosteitis

If X-rays are done, they sometimes reveal that the bones have greater density than is normally found. If pressure is applied over the long bones, pain is usually present.

One of the reasons why Panosteitis is not yet fully understood is that the X-ray signs do not always match the clinical signs. In other words, the bones cannot be the original cause of this ailment, or at least not the only cause.

A good dog pain killer can help your German Shepherd puppy in controlling the pain and enjoying its childhood despite this ailment. Your vet may probably suggest glucosamine and possibly even corticosteroids instead. However, glucosamine often do not help, and corticosteroids have severe and long-term side effects (see the Important Introductory Notes, Note 5). Hence avoid these by all means. Instead, the pain relief can go a long way towards helping your GSD puppy to feel more comfortable. Do not exceed the recommended daily dosage though.

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Do *not* follow the current rumor that a low protein - low calcium diet may help to prevent Panosteitis, because both are essential for your puppy's growth. In addition, the energy level of low protein - low calcium diets is often lower as well, so your puppy would need to eat much more of the diet in order to meet its energy needs - resulting in higher total calcium consumption. Better feed a special puppy diet and restrict the total quantity of food to keep your German Shepherd puppy lean.

Some veterinarians feel that this disease may be induced or worsened by stress, so you have another reason to keep your German Shepherd stress-free.

If your vet agrees, and if you can bear the cost, you could try out [Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM](#) for this condition too. It is originally meant as a joint health supplement and is very expensive (however this is relative, one tablet a day costs about 50 cent). Countless vets prescribe it to improve the dog's mobility, and virtually every dog owner who tried it celebrates it as a miracle product. It is a clinically tested, well over a decade old, non-prescription joint health supplement, and it can possibly also help your German Shepherd if Panosteitis has been diagnosed, since the cause and course of Panosteitis is yet unknown.

The crucial point is that [Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM](#) has no known side effects (not even long-term), hence you may want to give it a try if your vet agrees. But don't give more than half a tablet a day to your GSD puppy, and only if it is at least 6 to 8 months old.

8. Arthritis (Degenerative Joint Disease)

Arthritis is an ailment where the joints of the bones degenerate at age. Like human beings, all dogs can suffer from Arthritis as they age. Healthy German Shepherds seem not to be particularly susceptible to Arthritis, but generally all dogs may develop it as they age due to the nature of their joints, especially their hips and shoulders. Therefore, German Shepherds with Hip Dysplasia or Elbow Dysplasia are likely to suffer Arthritis later too.

**Who Gets Arthritis**

Purebred dogs are generally more susceptible to Arthritis, especially large dogs with a lot of weight put on their joints. All dogs can get Arthritis at some point in life, but Obesity (see 25) is a major contributing factor, and dogs that put undue stress on their joints (eg excessive jumping) can suffer much more from it than others.

**Warning Signs**

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Most commonly, dogs that are overweight and don’t get enough exercise develop Arthritis. Additionally, younger dogs can get Arthritis if they sustain an injury that puts undue stress on the joints. Hence it is best to look out for these three warning signs.

When your German Shepherd gets older, watch for any signs that it is losing its full range of motion. If your dog slows down, cannot get up stairs, or has trouble getting into the car at any point, you should visit a vet to determine the extent of the Arthritis and if your GSD needs medication or other aids to live life as normal.

**Avoiding and Treating Arthritis**

Arthritis can be *avoided* or at least postponed with regular exercise, a healthy diet and a careful eye for whenever your dog’s range of motion decreases. It is often inevitable at age though, and in that case it will be an issue that initially needs to be attended by a vet.

For the *treatment* of Arthritis a number of medications are available to *reduce pain* without side effects, and to improve the range of motion as your German Shepherd gets older.

Although there is no cure yet for Arthritis, countless dog owners claim that a daily tablet of the joint health supplement **Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM** has removed all its symptoms - so much that even 12 year old dogs are suddenly again jumping around like puppies. Indeed, Arthritis is the typical condition when vets recommend the administration of this **joint health supplement**.

Since there are no known side effects, many dog owners even give **Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM** to their yet unaffected dog, hoping to *avoid* Arthritis altogether. However, I am not supportive of this - the avoidance measures mentioned above seem more appropriate than to leave you with the idea “Exercise and diet are less important now since I give my dog this **joint health supplement**”. No, I would argue that regular exercise, a healthy diet, playtime together etc are more important!

In the earlier stages of Arthritis, an alternative (or addition) to medication and food supplements may be the **Back and Hip Support Brace**, which can help to give your German Shepherd the mobility it needs to feel good. In the later stages of Arthritis though the **Walkabout Rear Harness** may be needed.

Although Hip Dysplasia (see 2) is finally declining, it is still common among German Shepherds. Hip Dysplasia promotes Arthritis too. Hence, here you have another reason why you should ensure that you get your (next) German Shepherd from a **reputable breeder** who tests both dam and sire for dysplasia (and other hereditary ailments) before undertaking the breeding venture.

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9. Ear Infection (Canker or Otitis Externa)

Ear Infections usually affect the outer ear (Otitis Externa), which is painful. If untreated, they quickly grow to affect the inner ear too, which is not only painful but highly disturbing for your dog. Since a dog's ears are so crucial to its wellbeing (dogs listen more and better than they watch, we watch more and we listen hardly), you must ensure the best care for the ears of your German Shepherd.

Who Gets Ear Infections

Ear Infections are most common in dogs with floppy ears that do not get enough air to absorb moisture. Therefore German Shepherds are somewhat lucky here since their ears are generally upright anyway. However, moisture and dirt particles can get trapped in the ear and an infection can quickly form if you are not watchful. German Shepherd puppies with their floppy ears need extra care.

Both fungus and yeast are common factors in Ear Infections, in particular while the ears are floppy. Also common are Ear Infections as a result of ear mites, bacteria, food allergies in general, bad hygiene, or an environmental object or substance that got into the ear and now causes problems.

Particularly high risks are swimming in standing (and therefore often infested) water, prowling through the woods or high bushes, fights with other dogs, a draft at your dog's crate (or wherever you have your German Shepherd sleep or doze), and dust.

Warning Signs

The warning signs of an Ear Infection are excess ear wax, red inflammation, bad odor from the ears, constant scratching, shaking the head frequently, or general discomfort in your dog's behaviour.

Avoiding and Treating Ear Infections

To avoid Ear Infections, inspect your dog’s ears and ear canal daily or at least every other day and look out for the warning signs mentioned above. Clean your dog’s ears very carefully and remove the wax buildup, but don’t use anything with a sharp end. You can use this top ear cleanser and these cotton buds. Carefully roll the cotton buds inside the ear, but do not get deep into the ear! You must always be able to still see the cotton-covered end clearly, or else you would affect the delicate inner ear! The same applies when you use cotton buds for your own ears.

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To treat an existing Ear Infection, you should initially visit the vet, so that they can diagnose the cause of the infection and make sure that the inner ear has not yet been affected. Note that an Ear Infection poses a severe threat to your dog's overall health and wellbeing, and it is crucial to prevent that the infection affects the ear drum and inner ear too. Inner Ear Infections can easily spread to other parts of the body or create damaging high fevers that could kill your German Shepherd.

Again, typically many vets will then prescribe antibiotics - which are unnecessary here and often ineffective too. Instead, antibiotics will most likely make the Ear Infection chronic.

Therefore, once you have the diagnosis of the vet as described above, actual treatment in this case can be left to yourself (home treatment). In this case, to treat an existing Ear Infection (and to prevent a chronic Ear Infection to reoccur), use the top pet ear treatment without hydrocortisone first. This best remedy works well in almost every case, so that the sister product with hydrocortisone is not needed. Hydrocortisone is a corticosteroid, a hormone, and therefore it can have dramatic side effects with impact on seemingly unrelated body functions.

Remember, our aim should always be to get the correct diagnosis, and then to use the most appropriate treatment with the least side effects (especially long-term side effects). The Zymox Otic Pet Ear Treatment without Hydrocortisone is the most appropriate (and effective) remedy to treat Ear Infections. You can also use this on a weekly maintenance schedule to avoid future infections. Likewise you can even try this on other Skin Infections too (see 16), and many dog owners have done this with great success.

However, for the same reason (side effects), you should not use the sister product, Zymox Otic Pet Ear Treatment with Hydrocortisone on a maintenance schedule or on other Skin Infections. I hope you see, with every chapter better, why our advice makes so much sense.

10. Eye Infection (Conjunctivitis, Chronic Mucocutaneous Candidiasis etc)

Conjunctivitis is the most common Eye Infection among German Shepherds. Eye Infections are usually caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, but can also be caused by hereditary or Non-Infectious Eye Problems (see 21), an allergy like food allergy (see 19, Skin Allergies), dust, exposure to chemicals, or simply a draft.

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Eye Infections may become chronic if not treated, and can cause permanent damage if neglected.

**Who Gets Eye Infections**

Over the course of their life, every German Shepherd is likely to have an Eye Infection at some point. Like with Ear Infections (see 9), particularly high risks are swimming in standing (and therefore often infested) water, prowling through the woods or high bushes, fights with other dogs, a draft at your dog's crate (or wherever you have your German Shepherd sleep or doze), and dust.

**Warning Signs**

Conjunctivitis shows as a pink inside of the eyelids. Other infections may only show as clear or mucous discharge from the eye. As you will know, eyes must be a bit moist so don't misinterpret basic eye moisture as an infection-inflicted discharge.

You will know best how your GDS's eyes normally look. Perform a quick eyecheck daily or every other day, and compare this with your memory of how it should normally look. A deep look in the eyes of your German Shepherd also is a good behavioral and training element to improve bonding.

**Avoiding and Treating Eye Infections**

To *avoid* Eye Infections (and many other ailments), always take your German Shepherd under an outdoor shower straight after wading through or swimming in dirty or salty waters, or walking through the woods or high bushes. If you started showering your dog with a hose when it was a puppy (above 3 months of age), it will be used to it and will usually enjoy it. Just don't use too cold or too hot water. Eight to twelve degrees Celsius below body temperature is fine. So set the shower to between about 23 and 27 degrees Celsius, or 73 to 81 Fahrenheit.

Also, lubrication of the eyes is important, not only because it washes away eye irritants. If your dog's tear production is insufficient, the eyes will not be sufficiently lubricated. When you notice that your German Shepherd has dry eyes or is rubbing its eyes a lot, you can apply the self-activating and long-lasting *i-drop*. This will help avoid Eye Infections and also make your dog feel much more comfortable. In addition, this is often the most effective, quick and natural solution to Eye Infections in the early stages that do not yet show any warning signs.

However, if your dog is still rubbing its eyes after two days with this treatment, or if you start to see warning signs of an early Eye Infection, you should administer a *good antiseptic canine eye wash*. In many cases this will avoid the need to visit the vet. Nonetheless, in rare cases where this doesn't help, or whenever you suddenly
notice that you are dealing with a more serious Eye Infection, you should of course visit the vet to get their diagnosis.

Just be aware that time-pressured vets will often simply prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointments and potentially even oral antibiotics for this condition. Now read the Important Introductory Notes again, in particular Notes 5 to 7, to understand why this is so, and why this is almost certainly an inappropriate treatment (long-term side effects although possibly ineffective anyway). Remember:

When you have your vet's diagnosis, always consider their suggested treatment carefully.

To treat Eye Infections, again your first step should be the antiseptic canine eye wash as a safe, gentle, and very effective treatment of Eye Infections.

Depending on the vet's diagnosis, other remedies may be more specific though, eg Conjunctivitis is receptive to treatment with the antiseptic pink eye spray. If your German Shepherd does not allow you to spray into its eyes, the similar antiseptic eye gel may be more suitable.

11. Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation (Periodontitis, Gingivitis, etc)

Your German Shepherd can't brush its teeth, hence it can easily suffer from Periodontitis or Dental Disease from the spread of bacteria in its gums. Periodontitis is the single most common type of infectious dental disease in German Shepherds and is generally spread by the bacteria in plaque, especially when not properly controlled by regular brushing and cleaning.

Dental Disease and Gum Inflammation can not only lead to the loss of teeth, but also to other ailments much further down the line since the bacteria are ingested with food and water on a daily basis!

Who Gets Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation

Every German Shepherd can get Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation several times during their life. Contributory however would be a bad diet, such as sweetened industrial food, sweetened treats during the day, and inadequate cleaning of the teeth and gums.
Warning Signs

There are a number of warning signs of Periodontitis, Gingivitis etc. To start with, your dog will have bad breath, sometimes accompanied by bleeding of the gums. With just these symptoms, this ailment can still be stopped and treated relatively easily. However, once it develops further, the next stage of symptoms may include tooth loss, tooth extrusion, ulcers in the mouth, gum recession, and poor appetite due to pain. The last stage would be the symptoms of seemingly unrelated diseases as a consequence of ingesting the bacteria with food and water on a daily basis.

Also note that if your German Shepherd doesn't like to drink the fresh water you provide, it may simply be that your dog's gums are inflamed and overly sensitive to the temperature of the water. Provide the fresh water at either room temperature or (if your dog is outside) at about 22 degrees Celcius or 72 Fahrenheit.

Actually diagnosing a Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation starts with a full mouth inspection by the vet. Unfortunately, since 70% of the teeth of a German Shepherd are below the gum line, an X-ray cannot always be avoided if the vet must see what is happening below the gum line. If your GSD didn't get used to the vet inspecting its mouth etc as a puppy, general anaesthesia may be required for the dental examination.

Avoiding and Treating Dental Disease and Gum Inflammation

The easiest way to avoid Dental Disease and Gum Inflammation in your German Shepherd is to gently brush its teeth every other day with a dog dental product. Important are gentle downward movements, not across, so as not to hurt the gums. Ideal is to use an artificial dental finger for this. In addition, add Plaque Off to the food, every other day, to the latest meal of the day (so that it can work overnight as much as possible).

You should also have your dog's teeth checked when you visit the vet - every 6 months or so. However, if you do what I write here, you'll hear from your vet: "Teeth and Gums are in perfect condition", and the vet won't charge you anything for dental treatment.

To treat an early Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation, you can spray Petzlife Oral Care once around the upper teeth and once around the lower teeth - both in the evening before sleeping, when your German Shepherd is most unlikely to drink. This
natural medicament will mix with your dog's saliva and improve oral health and also promote fresh breath.

The advantage over the typical (cheaper) antiseptic mouth wash is that this dog oral care spray is alcohol-free and does not destroy the oral flora. You probably don't know but the typical antiseptic mouth wash destroys not only harmful bacteria but the oral flora too - which is why your poor fellow family members have to use the mouth wash regularly, or their bad breath is soon unbearable.

Bad breath is the result of an oral flora that has been destroyed - either 1) by bacteria, 2) by stomach acids too frequently finding their way to the mouth because of a Digestive Disorder (see 5), or 3) by mouth wash, yes! Therefore, better give your human family members an alcohol-free, more natural mouth wash with the added benefit to cleanse and heal smaller oral wounds too, and give your canine family members Petzlife Oral Care.

Serious cases of Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation the vet will treat with more antiseptics and a series of dental procedures such as ultrasonic scaling, root planning and pocketing in the teeth to remove the affected areas.

To avoid such serious cases (and the related vet bills!), you could try the top oral health spray, although it's expensive. However, as always, this is relative: When you compare the cost of regularly using this remedy with the vet's bill for any of the above measures, you would immediately agree that even Leba III is worth every ounce.

Another factor that should not be overlooked is that you can actually avoid that your dog will have to go under anesthesia just to have its teeth cleaned or treated - which regularly puts enormous stress on a German Shepherd, especially at age.

Unfortunately, to treat Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation, often the average vet may try to prescribe antibiotics (again!). Another situation where antibiotics are both unnecessary and inappropriate - read our Important Introductory Notes 5 to 7! Conversely, holistic vets often recommend exactly these two oral care remedies, Petzlife and Leba III.

Nevertheless, note that in severe cases tooth extraction may be required to stop the spread of the disease through your dog's mouth.

12. Paw Thickening (Interdigital Cysts, Pyoderma, and Granuloma)

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Interdigital Cysts are thickenings between the toes of the paw. However, what appears to be a cyst rarely is a cyst. Real cysts are usually follicular cysts or suety gland cysts.

Pyoderma is a Bacterial Skin Infection (see 16). Allergies and immune mediated diseases can initiate Interdigital Pyoderma. Often when this is the case there will be other skin diseases (see 16 and 19) or chronic Ear Infections (see 9) in conjunction with the Paw Thickenings. Pathogen Paw Thickenings can also be linked to Hypothyroidism (see 17). Recurrences are frequent, which means Paw Thickenings are often chronic.

Granuloma is a mass that is formed around an irritation as the dog's defense mechanism. It is the body's attempt to protect itself against an infection, foreign body or other irritation. If you are lucky enough to remove the offending irritant together with the Granuloma, then there usually won't be a recurrence.

Who Gets Paw Thickening

German Shepherds seem to be prone to thickenings between the toes. They can be quite sore and make your dog lame. Sometimes, if the thickenings appear on more than one paw, the cause may be a fungal infection. Paw Thickenings often go hand-in-hand with Allergies (see 19) and other Immune System Disorders (see 17). Thickenings found on one paw only can also be caused by a foreign object like a grass seed, or by in ingrown toenail.

Paw problems are very common with German Shepherds that are working or exercising a lot outside in rough terrain, and the reason is simple. You really need to think about it: Dogs go barefoot all the time. They have to run barefoot on burning-hot black asphalt in the summer, on pavements that have been de-iced with salts or chemicals in the winter, and over rough and thorny terrain all year long.

Hence, although German Shepherds generally have very hard soles, active GSDs can contract Paw Thickenings frequently. A cut, sting, ice, salt, etc between the toes or on the soles can be enough to cause an infection and to make your dog lame.

In addition consider this: When your dog feels pain or an irritation at a paw, it will lick the paw - unless you cover it with Pawz disposable and reusable dog boots (don't worry about the picture, the large size should fit your German Shepherd well) or with one of the Protective Dog Boots.

This means, whatever was on the paw (salt, dirt, bacteria, chemicals) will be ingested and can lead to additional ailments like Digestive Disorder (see 5), Dental Disease or Gum Inflammation (see 11), Diarrhea (see 22), or Vomiting (see 29), and

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to consequent ailments like Dehydration (see 1), Tumor (see 20), etc. That's why Paw Thickenings usually lead to seemingly unrelated further ailments too.

Warning Signs

Make a quick daily check to see if the paws look different to usual, in particular between the toes and underneath on the pads.

There is often no redness, just a hard thickening of the skin somewhere on the paw, most likely between the toes. That's why this group of ailments is often called Paw Thickening. If you gently squeeze the thickening, your German Shepherd will still pull away, showing discomfort.

Avoiding and Treating Paw Thickening

The most basic avoidance measures are the following.

First, think before you take your German Shepherd outside: Where will your dog walk? What kind of terrain is it, and hence what potential environmental impacts do you need to consider (see above). Depending on what outdoor exercise you are expecting, you may then want to protect your dog's paws before anything can happen to them.

Frequently exercising your dog on hard surfaces such as concrete or just once on rugged, rough, icy, de-iced, hot, or chemical-affected surfaces can cause sore paws or cracked pads. To strengthen and protect your dog's paws and pads, Musher's Secret is great. However, firstly, use it sparingly before walks in hazardous terrain and after walks whenever the paws between the toes are sore or the pads are cracked. Sparingly because too frequent use without corresponding outdoor exercise would actually soften the pads and make them prone to cuts, stings, and infections.

Secondly, whenever you've applied any ointment, make sure that your dog can't lick it off and ingest it. Hence, for example, when you've applied Musher's Secret on the paws, cover the paws with Pawz disposable and reusable dog boots or with one of the Protective Dog Boots.

If you take your German Shepherd on rugged or rocky terrain, on hot asphalt, on de-iced streets and pavements, or on gravel, it will be worth getting your dog a set of Muttluks All Weather Shoes or, better even, the Full Feature Boots or the High Performance Boots (the best of the best). They protect your dog's feet similar to how you would protect your own feet in such terrain - and you're probably not as agile as your German Shepherd is. Furthermore, they look cool on a German Shepherd too.

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Also consider that harmful chemicals are in more places than we think: Carpet and floor cleaners, lawn and garden care, etc. In other words, with a German Shepherd in your household you need to think twice what substances you buy and use.

In addition, always keep your dog's nails trimmed so that they do not catch on anything and tear. If you don't know how to trim your dog's nails safely, ask your vet to show you or take your dog to a professional dog groomer and watch closely.

Next, while you are outside with your German Shepherd, try not to walk on hot asphalt or blacktop, on gravel, rugged surfaces, or de-iced pavements - unless you've covered your dog's feet with the Full Feature Boots or the High Performance Boots. Instead, ideally walk in grassy areas where your dog's paws won't burn, get cut or torn, or salty. On your own paths only use pet-safe ice melt, because chemicals eg in street salt and sand that prevents slipping can burn your dog's footpads, leading it to lick and ingest harmful chemicals and non-digestible substances.

Watch for hazards in the terrain where you walk or exercise your dog. If you walk in the city, watch for things like broken glass, nails, gravel, and sharp concrete. If you walk in the country, watch for sharp rocks, burrs, and thorns.

Finally, after you come back from outdoor exercise, think again: Where have you been? If your dog was subjected to terrain that may have had chemicals on them (eg detergents, dumps in the wild, etc) or salt (particularly in winter), or that may have been infested with parasites, or that had loose gravel or thorns of any kind, use an outdoor shower or whatever and natural dog shampoo, and rinse each paw under warm water to wash off any residue thoroughly. Afterwards inspect the paws, remove any foreign objects, and disinfect with an antiseptic wound spray.

Always briefly inspect the paws after each outdoor exercise. This takes only two seconds each, so in just eight seconds you're done, and this could easily save you a lot of trouble and your German Shepherd a lot of pain, Digestive Disorder (see 5), and further ailments.

If something is lodged in your dog's paw, carefully remove it with tweezers, wash the paw well, and apply a strong antiseptic wound spray. If the paw pads are dry, chapped, or cracked, apply Musher's Secret again, and cover the paws with Pawz disposable and reusable dog boots or the Protective Dog Boots. You can try if your GSD is fine with only the one affected paw covered. If this makes your dog nervous, you may need to cover all four paws even if only one is affected.

Small wounds must be washed out under running water, always treated with antiseptic wound spray, and once this is dried up (within 20 seconds max)

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immediately hard-bandaged or soft-bandaged before you cover the paws with either of the dog boots.

Don't rely on the bitter taste of bandages, claiming it would help deter your dog from scratching or chewing the affected area - it won't. At the latest at night, when your dog is alone, it will start paying attention to the affected area. That's why it's often ideal to cover all four paws with either of the dog boots, not just the affected one.

If a wound is large or bleeds excessively, hard-bandage it and visit the vet immediately.

**Treating Pathogen Paw Thickening**

Dogs that are prone to cyst formation, especially epidermoid cysts, tend to get more than one of them. Complete removal by your vet should eliminate them for the moment. However, it is highly likely that a cyst will develop somewhere else if this was the type of cyst present. It is not always necessary to remove epidermoid cysts but they are prone to rupturing or becoming inflamed and painful.

To treat Interdigital Pyoderma and similar foot conditions, various cortisone-based and antibiotic powders and ointments have been trialled. Nothing seems to work on every dog, it generally ends up in trial-and-error treatments. We strongly advise against supplying your German Shepherd as guinea pig for such medicament experiments. The earlier you notice Interdigital Pyoderma, the easier it is to eliminate it with just a strong antiseptic spray that you apply on the paw multiple times per day.

This not only saves you money. The problem with all antibiotic and cortisone-based remedies is the long-term side effects - which are jumpstarted even if the medicament doesn't work anyway. This is very frustrating. Hence, better try to avoid Paw Thickening, other Skin Infections (see 16) and Allergies (see 19) altogether, using the detailed avoidance measures laid out above.

Since antibiotic ointments often don't work at all, in severe cases some sort of systemic medication (oral or injectable) may be necessary, and this affects the whole body. They destroy the good bacteria in the stomach and the gut flora, and subsequent medical replacements are rarely sufficient. The consequence is almost always Bloat (see 4), Digestive Disorder (see 5), and Diarrhea (see 22) or constipation. Even a preceding bacterial culture and antibiotic sensitivity testing rarely help in choosing a suitable antibiotic treatment.

Therefore, better stick with the effective and appropriate antiseptic treatment. Another advantage of a strong antiseptic spray is that it is effective against virtually all forms of the three major types of germs: bacterial, viral, and fungal infections.

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Compare this with eg Tinactin, which is only effective against fungal infections of a certain form, and you understand the enormous benefits of using the right remedy - and without any side effects whatsoever. In addition, you would first need (and pay) a vet to determine if it's a fungal infection - and once there, the average vet will then try to sell you the antibiotic and cortisone-based remedies mentioned above - and use your German Shepherd as guinea pig.

Nonetheless, if your German Shepherd is already limping badly or appears to be in pain, visit the vet in any case in order to get the right diagnosis and to consider the suggested treatment.

13. Hind Leg Weakness (Posterior Paresis, Paralysis)

Posterior Paresis or Paralysis is ordinarily caused by pressure, injury, or degeneration of the nerves of the part of the spinal cord that is associated with the proper functioning of the hind limbs. The cause may be hereditary (eg Osteochondroma), an injury (back injury), or even an allergy (eg tick infestation).

The condition is not painful but very irritating for your German Shepherd since your dog cannot judge the position of its limbs. This ailment stops progressing when the dog's skeleton reaches maturity.

Who Gets Posterior Paresis

Hind Leg Weakness is normally a disease in young German Shepherds where abnormalities of bone and cartilage in the vertebral canal cause compression of the spinal cord. Considerably less than 1% of German Shepherds are diagnosed with this Paralysis.

Warning Signs

The condition may develop gradually with signs of a progressive lameness that finally culminates in paralysis, but more often it appears suddenly. The affected dog is gradually or suddenly unable to coordinate voluntary movement of the hind limbs, one after the other. When paralysis sets in, the affected limbs may hang limply or they may acquire a characteristic stiffness.

Treating Posterior Paresis

The condition may be rather mild, in which case it is often transitory in nature and is readily amenable to routine treatment, including the Back and Hip Support Brace or surgery. In cases where the condition is severe, it may be entirely resistant to the
entire gamut of medical alternatives, and you may have to use the Bottoms-up Leash, or better the Walkabout Rear Harness or the Walkin Lift Harness to allow your dog a bit of mobility.

Early diagnosis is crucial to prevent progression of this ailment and to restore the dog's control over its hind limbs.

Sometimes good nutrition, proper hygiene, massage, hot packs, and nerve tonics may be helpful, but more often than not this is insufficient. Where the paralysis is due to an intestinal obstruction, the elimination of the obstruction usually results in the disappearance of the paralysis. This may be done by an enema or by internal manipulation with instruments.

If this treatment does not yield any positive results within about seven days, then sadly there are only the following alternatives left: Use of the Bottoms-up Leash, or better the Walkabout Rear Harness or the Walkin Lift Harness - and in severe cases the dog wheelchair. The only alternative to these measures would be to put the dog to sleep.

14. Blood Disorder (von Willebrand's Disease)

Von Willebrand's Disease (vWD) is an inherited deficiency in the blood clotting factor (Von Willebrand's factor) which prevents proper blood clotting, particularly upon an injury or after surgery. This means that an injured dog could potentially bleed to death. This ailment is similar to hemophilia in humans.

Who Gets vWD

Von Willebrand's Disease is still fairly common in German Shepherds - although the German Shepherd breed is not at particular risk of having this disease (the Doberman is). It equally affects male and female dogs alike.

Since vWD is hereditary, it would be ideal to genetically test a German Shepherd puppy for this disease. However, at the time of writing, apparently the DNA test to detect the Type 1 vWD that is typical for German Shepherds is not yet being offered for German Shepherds.

Alternatively, the vet can perform a screening test where the bleeding time after a standard cut is being measured. However, since some dogs do not become obvious bleeders until later in life, this test is inferior to a genetic test. A genetic test is also of importance because an affected dog should not be administered certain drugs (see below), at least not during bleeding episodes.

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Warning Signs

Dogs with Von Willebrand's disease may develop nosebleeds or may be bleeding from the gums. Bleeding may also occur in the stomach or intestine in which case the stool may either have blood in it or be black and tarry. Some dogs will have blood in their urine. Bleeding into the joints also occurs, which can cause symptoms similar to those of Arthritis (see 8). However, note that the similarity in symptoms does not necessarily mean that Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM would be effective here too.

When you notice prolonged bleeding of your German Shepherd, even if it seems only minor, say from the gums, you should take your GSD to the vet to determine the genuine cause of the bleeding.

What is prolonged bleeding? The normal bleeding time depends on where the bleeding occurs, and can be anywhere between 1 to 10 minutes. This means, if your German Shepherd is bleeding anywhere for more than 10 minutes, it likely has a Blood Disorder or blood clotting disorder, and you should take your dog to the vet to find out more.

Avoiding and Treating vWD

To avoid that your German Shepherd may be affected by vWD would require that you choose a German Shepherd breeder who carefully eliminates affected dogs from the breeding program. This corroborates our call to be very selective about the breeder you will get your next German Shepherd from. If you live in the USA, UK, or Canada, then the Dog Breeder Directory on MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org may provide initial help.

Since vWD is hereditary, there is no way to avoid this disease in your German Shepherd other than making sure that its family tree is not affected.

To treat vWD, a lot has been trialled. However, at the time of writing, there are only few drugs that seem to help some affected dogs (not all dogs), and their active substance is Desmopressin Acetate. An alternative is transfusion of blood or plasma of a healthy dog with the same blood type.

However, note that there is no known cure for Von Willebrand's disease. If you have a German Shepherd with vWD, you must try to avoid activities where your dog could sustain an injury that would lead to bleeding. In cases of severe injury and during surgery, the vet will make use of the treatments mentioned above.

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Also note that avoidance of certain medications is critical for a dog with vWD, because these drugs may elicit or aggravate a bleeding episode: Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Antihistamines, Phenylbutazone, Sulfua-based antibiotics, Estrogens, Ampicillin and Amoxicillin, Penicillin, Phenothiazine tranquilizers, Heparin, and Theophylline. In addition, dogs with vWD must be spared stress.

15. Lumbosacral Stenosis (Cauda Equina Syndrome)

Lumbosacral Stenosis is a result of a form of Arthritis (see 8) of the joint between the last lumbar vertebra and the sacrum, which is one of the bones that makes up the pelvis. This Arthritis narrows the canal where the spinal cord and nerves pass through. The intervertebral disc between the vertebra and the sacrum is often abnormal as well, further narrowing the canal.

The Arthritis and disc disease put pressure on the nerves coming off the spinal cord. The condition results in severe backpain, pain in one or both hind legs, or pain in the tail. The pain can make your dog quite stiff at the rear.

Who Gets Lumbosacral Stenosis

Lumbosacral Stenosis is fairly common in German Shepherds and some other large dog breeds. It can affect both male and female GSDs. It usually does not occur before the dog is 3 to 7 years old.

Warning Signs

The most common sign of the Cauda Equina Syndrome is pain. The pain may occur in the back, in one or both hind legs, or the tail. The pain can make your dog whine or be nervous, seek your comfort or hide away. Usually the dog will have difficulty rising after lying down, but once it begins to walk it will work out of the stiffness.

Because of reduced activity there may be muscle loss in one or both rear legs. Some dogs are unable to move their tail, or have severe pain if you move the tail. Often, affected dogs will have a shuffling gait, and scuff their toes. Some affected dogs will chew on their pelvic area, hind limbs, or tail - the part that hurts them. This self-mutilation can create considerable additional damage.

Finally, the dog may have difficulty urinating or defecating because of the pain, and it may even become incontinent or may be unable to urinate at all. Since the inability to urinate or to defecate is a life-threatening situation, it is crucial that you observe your dog closely if you notice the other warning signs of Lumbosacral Stenosis.

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Avoiding and Treating Lumbosacral Stenosis

Since Lumbosacral Stenosis is a result of Arthritis, it would seem obvious to avoid Arthritis (see 8) in the first place in order to avoid Lumbosacral Stenosis too.

Diagnosis of this ailment is through physical exams, reflex testing, X-rays, and injecting dye into the affected area and X-raying again. Depending on the severity, the dog's health and other factors, treatment of diagnosed Lumbosacral Stenosis is surgical or nonsurgical. However, the nonsurgical treatment (6 to 8 weeks strict resting together with anti-inflammatory medications) does not provide a permanent cure, only temporary relief from the symptoms for as long as medication is given.

The top remedy to treat Arthritis is Nutramax Dasuquin with MSM (see 8). Although this joint health supplement can effectively remove the symptoms of Arthritis, it is yet unclear whether it is similarly effective to treat the symptoms (or here possibly the cause) of Lumbosacral Stenosis too.

Dogs who are mildly affected by Lumbosacral Stenosis may be able to return to normal function. For those who are incontinent or unable to urinate prior to treatment, the prognosis is much poorer. For example, for dogs who have difficulty or are unable to urinate, the bladder must be manually expressed several times a day. In severe cases, the stress on the dog and the owner is too much for treatment, and the dog is better put to sleep.

16. Bacterial Skin Infection (Dermatitis or Hot Spots)

While red spots and inflammation on German Shepherds' skin may also be caused by Skin Allergies (see 19), the more severe skin problems generally develop in the form of actual infections or hot spots. The fur recedes, swelling occurs and the dog starts to show signs of an infection - such as reduced appetite, lethargy, general malaise, and possibly even fever.

Bacterial Skin Infections come in many forms. Superficial Pyoderma, also known as hot spots, is the most common and the one your dog is most likely to experience. They are caused by the overgrowth of bacteria on the surface of the dog's skin and are avoidable and very easily treatable if caught early.

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Hot spots will most commonly occur on the legs, backside, flanks, and paws – the places where a dog can lick and bite most easily, which means your dog is of high risk to ingest the bacteria too which will lead to seemingly unrelated ailments. Severe hot spots can also appear on the neck, ears and head as well.

Who Gets Skin Infections

Dogs most commonly susceptible to hot spots include those with heavy coats, histories of infections and allergies, fleas, problems with their anal sacs, grooming issues and hair tangles. Keep in mind, however, that even a perfectly healthy short haired German Shepherd can get hot spots out of nowhere, so it is not a limited issue. Humidity and warmth can increase the risk of hot spots due to trapped moisture.

Warning Signs

There are usually no warning signs before the hot spots appear. They will show up one day and need to be treated immediately. A hot spot is usually indicated by circular patches where the hair is missing and the skin gets swollen, itchy, and exudes pus. Sometimes hair can mat over the lesion, obscuring the size and degree of the problem.

The dog will often lick the affected area and hence ingest the bacteria too, which makes the whole situation much worse. In addition, an affected dog may bite and scratch the area to the point of causing injury or even bleeding - and contracting the bacteria on the paws too.

Avoiding and Treating Skin Infections

To avoid Bacterial Skin Infections in future, target the cause of the problem and then treat it - or you will have recurrences. If it is a grooming issue, make sure you’re combing your German Shepherd - if needed, even twice a day. When you comb, use a suitable soft-ended rake, a 45 degree angle, and no pressure on the skin.

If your GSD has allergies, visit a vet and get treatment for the allergies first. This may often require flea and tick medication, a new diet, or treatment with antihistamines (read more under Skin Allergies, see 19). It should never require antibiotics - which generally don't work here anyway - they are inappropriate for both Skin Infections and Skin Allergies (see 19).

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If the cause seems to be psychological (nervousness, separation anxiety, etc), you may need to get your German Shepherd more exercise and keep it busy so that it doesn’t get so bored as to cause these infections.

To treat an existing Skin Infection, several steps are needed to ensure success. First look for fleas, mites, or other external parasites, an insect sting or bite, or injury (skin wound, scrape, etc). Carefully wash away all foreign objects with this soothe cream conditioner. Afterwards apply a strong antiseptic spray to the infected area. When this has dried up (ca 20 seconds), apply Vet's Best Hot Spot Spray as the third step of treatment. Finally, where possible, you may want to hard-bandage the area of the Skin Infection if your German Shepherd does not leave the area alone to heal.

Watch your dog closely to ensure it does not lick, chew, or scratch the infected area.

You may think that these three or four steps of treating the Skin Infection are "too much". However, experience shows that dog owners who do anything less or different, generally complain that they can't get rid of the Skin Infection, or that it is recurring. Conversely, the treatment outlined above works.

Note that an affected dog is usually highly agitated and will not leave the area alone. Some dogs will even growl or snap if the area is touched! So, be very careful with the infected area. Also, don't touch the infected area with your bare hands. Nonetheless wash your hands thoroughly after the treatment, and use an antiseptic lotion on your hands too.

Distract your dog as much as you can to stop it licking, chewing or scratching.

Outdoor exercise is ideal, unless the sun is burning. Even without an acute skin infection, when the sun is burning, consider to apply a natural dog-suitable sun-block to your dog's lightly haired areas.

Don't let your German Shepherd swim anywhere for at least a week after the hot spot has disappeared completely. Don't bathe your GSD either during this time. A shower is good though because of the cleansing effect of running water and the soothe cream conditioner. Afterwards, again use the strong antiseptic wound spray and Vet's Best Hot Spot Spray. Where possible, hard-bandage the infected area, particularly during night-time.

During the day, ensure that your dog cannot lick, chew, or scratch the treated skin. If it does, you can alternate the above treatment with a flimsy coating of ClearSkin-E Cream to prevent itching (but then have at least 60 minutes between both treatments).

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Some dogs have been known to self-initiate a hot spot out of boredom, pain from a previous injury, or stress-related psychological problems. Hence, consider all these factors as well.

Hot spots that are not treated promptly will often grow and make your dog very irritable and possibly sick. They can also lead to German Shepherd behavior problems. Therefore, immediate treatment as outlined above is advisable.

Note that chronic Skin Infections are often a reason for your vet to test for Hypothyroidism (see 17).

### 17. Immune System Disorder (Hypothyroidism)

Hypothyroidism is a hormonal disorder due to an underproduction of the thyroid. It is thought to be hereditary. The thyroid controls the speed of the metabolism, so dogs with low thyroid levels have a slow metabolic rate. Hence if they continue to get the same amount of food and exercise, they will get fat and soon suffer from Obesity too (see 25).

**Who Gets Hypothyroidism**

German Shepherds seem to be prone to disorders associated with the immune system. Hypothyroidism often shows up between the ages of 2 and 5.

One possible cause of Hypothyroidism is thought to be an autoimmune disease: The body attacks the thyroid.

**Warning Signs**

Hypothyroidism has very different symptoms. If your dog shows a strange change in behavior, gains weight without obvious reason, has skin problems, hair loss or hair thinning, hesitates to exercise or loses stamina, and you cannot identify the cause, consider to have done a test at your vet to see if a thyroid dysfunction is the cause.

**Treating Hypothyroidism**

Once diagnosed through a simple and inexpensive test, the treatment is simple and fairly inexpensive too. Your vet will prescribe medication which is very effective in regulating thyroid hormone production to control the metabolism. However, your dog
must be monitored with regular blood tests to ensure the dosage is correct. With the correct dosage, your dog will return to normal behavior and appearance within a couple of days.

However, if the Immune System Disorder is permanent, the administration of the medication must be permanent too.

18. Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neuronal disorder showing as recurring seizures. Seizures are described as an uncoordinated firing of the neurons usually within a portion of the brain called the cerebrum.

The actual cause of epilepsy is still unknown (like with humans) and can be either hereditary or develop over time with unknown environmental factors. Most experts agree it is hereditary, but since the exact defect is unknown, you can't avoid to get an affected puppy.

Who Gets Epilepsy

Epilepsy can hit every dog breed, however German Shepherds are affected more often. Epilepsy usually starts to occur at the age of 2 to 3 years, but it can start as early as 6 months of age.

Warning Signs

To the inattentive, a seizure seems to happen with no warning, however if you observe your dog closely, you can often recognize three phases to a seizure:

Pre-Seizure Phase: The pre-seizure phase is commonly called the aura. Your German Shepherd may appear restless, pace, seek affection, salivate, whine, or hide. These signs occur just minutes before the actual seizure begins.

Ictus: The seizure itself is called ictus. Your GSD may look far away and twitch lightly, or it could fall to the ground with its whole body shaking, it could be barking, urinate or defecate, it may appear excited, vomit, salivate, run in circles, collapse, and have uncoordinated muscle activity. This stage generally lasts less than 5 minutes.

Post-Ictal Phase: After the seizure, the recovery begins (post-ictal period). Your German Shepherd may seem disoriented, uncoordinated, wandering or pacing. It
may remain unresponsive and continue salivating for some time. Occasionally a dog may even be temporarily blind. This may last several minutes to days.

Do not feel like you should be able to recognize the symptoms of a seizure before it occurs. With some dogs, it's impossible to notice when it's about to happen.

**Treating Epilepsy/ Seizures**

When a seizure occurs, you should not panic because your dog is not suffering, only highly irritated to the stage of unawareness of its surroundings. Move any objects away so that your dog cannot hurt itself. Make sure to time how long the seizure lasts for and take note of what your dog does and how it moves during the seizure, so that you'll have a full record for the vet. If the seizure lasts for more than 5 minutes, you need to call an emergency vet immediately.

You need *not* worry about your dog swallowing its tongue. If you try to put something in your dog's mouth, you would likely get bitten or you might even block its airway. So, don't do that. Instead, leave your dog alone during a seizure.

If it is the first seizure, then visit the vet afterwards and show them the data you recorded. If your dog does not fully recover within half an hour after a seizure, contact the vet and follow their directions.

Your vet may suggest to prescribe drug treatment for Epilepsy (eg Phenobarbital, Diazepam, or Bromide - which are all for different levels of seizures), however some of them will have severe and long-term side effects (in particular the latter). Therefore, you should carefully consider the vet's suggestion in relation to the very limited impact of seizures on your dog's overall quality of life.

Your vet may also give you specific at-home restrictions, including diet and exercise guidelines. Make sure you keep your vet up-to-date whenever a seizure occured.

**19. Skin Allergies**

Dogs are just as susceptible to allergies as human beings but they don't have the chance to go to the pharmacy to pick up Claritin, Zyrtec or similar medicaments. All they can do is lick, chew or scratch if the allergy affects their skin and they can reach the affected area.

Allergic reactions in dogs manifest primarily in the skin, while allergic reactions in humans primarily manifest in a runny nose, coughing, and itchy eyes.

If your dog starts to show any of the warning signs of a Skin Allergy, initially the vet should be your first point of contact, because they must determine what type of
The 31 Most Common German Shepherd Ailments and Treatments AT A GLANCE

...it is (see below). However, there are quite effective ways to avoid Skin Allergies altogether.

Who Gets Skin Allergies

Any dog can contract a Skin Allergy. However, dogs that are fed dry food too early or too often are more susceptible to suffer a food allergy, and short haired German Shepherds are more likely to suffer from skin contact allergies (caused by eg flea bites).

Conversely, should your German Shepherd be one of the few that are from a family line bred for water sports or hunting, then it will be less susceptible to flea bite allergies and moisture issues. Still, any German Shepherd can suffer allergies from dampness and flea bites.

Warning Signs

There are three main types of Skin Allergies that can affect your German Shepherd. Most Skin Allergies are a consequence of 1) flea bites, then come 2) food allergies, and finally 3) inhalant allergies (primarily pollen, dust, and chemicals).

In all cases the skin will often grow irritated and red. Swelling may occur, but this will most often be a result of scratching, biting, or excess licking by your dog.

If your dog starts to lose hair as a result of the reaction or gets an ear infection too, it might be a long-term food allergy related to serving processed food – a common problem that occurs in many dogs that eat industrial dog foods.

Other warning signs are frequent sneezing or coughing, or rubbing the eyes.

Avoiding and Treating Skin Allergies

To avoid Skin Allergies, first make sure your German Shepherd is given effective flea and tick medication on a regular basis if you live in an affected area. This will avoid the first type of Skin Allergies. It is important not just for flea bite allergies, but for avoiding potential sickness from tick bites and other parasites that will latch on to your dog when it is outside.

Second, avoid feeding your German Shepherd industrial food with too many grain fillers. This can help to avoid the second type of Skin Allergies. Rice is the safest grain, but corn, soy and wheat are all allergenic. Processed meats can also cause food allergies, and table scraps should strictly be avoided due to the substances in human food that a dog's metabolism cannot process.

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Best is really to prepare your dog’s food yourself, fresh and natural - like for yourself (hopefully). If you don't do this, or if you don't have the time to do this for your dog regularly, at least consider what we write about healthy dog meals in this Health Manual and on MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org. Avoid industrial food with preservatives, additives, fillers etc, high fat - high protein - high calcium - high sodium food, and generally any food that has been "enriched" with presumably “healthy” substances. The healthiest food is a balanced diet of natural food, not artificially "enriched" food, ie processed food!

Finally, to avoid the third type of Skin Allergies, inhalant allergies, observe your dog for signs of frequent sneezing or coughing in certain conditions or at certain times of the year. Also notice when your dog is frequently rubbing its eyes or ears. All of this can indicate that something in the environment is impacting your dog. For example, pollen, dust, or a specific scent that is carrying eg chemicals, like air refreshers in rooms.

By the way, air refreshers are always, in every situation, hazardous for your entire family, not just for your German Shepherd. Brilliant marketing by the producers doesn't change the fact that they pollute your lungs and bronchi. The consequence regularly are respiratory problems - sometimes immediately, sometimes many years later, but always chronic! If you want refreshed air, guess what, open the window.

If your dog starts to show any of the signs of a Skin Allergy mentioned above, initially visit the vet to establish the genuine cause of the symptoms. They will likely take blood tests and possibly put your dog on an elimination diet to see how its allergic reactions respond.

To treat Skin Allergies, very often all that is needed are basic nutritional changes and lots of regular outdoor exercise. The symptoms of some inhalant allergies can effectively be controlled with effective inhalant allergy medication. The skin condition should be treated with the soothe cream conditioner under running water. If you can afford it or if you have a tube of ClearSkin-E Cream for yourself anyway, apply a flimsy coating to the most affected skin areas.

However, since we are not dealing with a Bacterial Skin Infection (see 16), the antiseptic spray, Vet's Best Hot Spot Spray, and similar treatments are not needed here.

If you use the soothe cream conditioner and apply the ClearSkin-E Cream mentioned above, you probably won't need to hard-bandage the affected area either: What is not itching, your dog won't lick, scratch or bite.
20. Tumor (Malignant Neoplasm or Hemangiosarcoma)

Like human beings, dogs are susceptible to a number of forms of benign and malignant cancers in their skin, bones and organs. Each type of cancer is different in its growth rate, symptoms, and prognosis. Most cancers are treatable if they are identified early, and many tumors that are found with routine screening are benign and can be removed without extensive treatment.

Who Gets Tumors

Any dog can develop cancer, however purebred dogs with long lines of inbreeding are more susceptible to developing a tumor - in most cases a benign tumor. In addition, unaltered dogs are far more likely to get cancer than those that have been safely spayed or neutered at a young age (6 months of age at the latest). Hence if you have a spayed or neutered German Shepherd with no inbreeding in its family line, your GSD has a good chance never to be affected by a tumor.

Statistically, once an unaltered German Shepherd reaches 10 years of age (or about 56 in dog years, see German Shepherd age - How old does my dog think it is?), the dog has a nearly 50% chance of developing some form of cancer. However, the good news is that around 60% of all diagnosed cancer in dogs is benign – the result of fatty tumors that can be removed relatively easily, if identified early. Therefore, regardless of your dog’s age, you should watch for the variety of possible warning signs.

Warning Signs

The warning signs to watch for cover all cancer types. According to the Veterinary Cancer Society, the most common signs of cancer are:

- Abnormal swellings, or spots with strange coloring, that persist or continue to grow
- Sores or lesions that do not heal
- Sudden weight loss without obvious reason
- Loss of appetite
- Unusual or unexplained bleeding, blood in either urine, vomit, or feces, or unusual discharge from any body opening (incl. ears, eyes, nose)
- Offensive odor
- Difficulty when eating or swallowing
- Hesitation to exercise (lethargy) or loss of stamina
- Persistent lameness or stiffness
- Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating

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- Vomiting (see 29)
- Diarrhea (see 22)

However, as you will notice, these tumor warning signs can also be present in many other ailments. For example, a hesitation to exercise or loss of stamina could indicate Degeneration of the Spinal Cord (see 23), Immune System Disorder (see 17), Lumbosacral Stenosis (see 15), Hind Leg Weakness (see 13), Arthritis (see 8), Panosteitis (see 7), Elbow Dysplasia (see 3), or Hip Dysplasia (see 2).

In addition, some of these warning signs will naturally come together, one after another. For example, loss of appetite will lead to a sudden weight loss (if exercise remains the same), and then also to hesitation to exercise and loss of stamina.

Therefore, no individual warning sign is sufficient to indicate cancer (or any other ailment). A vet too will look at the existence (and absence) of several symptoms before they determine which ailment to test for. In addition, remember that the majority of diagnosed tumors are benign, and that spayed or neutered dogs cannot develop certain tumors anyway.

Avoiding and Treating Tumors

Avoiding and/or treating tumors is not always possible. However, there are some steps you can take to help avoid tumors:

- Avoid letting your German Shepherd get too much sun. Despite (possibly) having more hair than a human, dogs are just as susceptible to skin cancer as humans are. However, dogs can neither apply suntan lotion nor wear sunglasses, hat, and long-sleeves. Hence, you will need to supply your German Shepherd with sun protection - depending on your geography, possibly every day.

- As a minimum, apply an (alcohol- and chemical-free!) natural dog-suitable sun-block to your dog's thinly haired areas (particularly on nose, ears, head, muzzle, and paws - but not eyes).

- The other areas you can cover with the (right-sized!) UV Protective Shirt.

- Have your dog spayed (if female) or neutered (if male) before it goes into its first heat. Things have changed and today spaying and neutering can be done as early as 3 months of age. Get it done before your dog is 6 months old, because the earlier you spay or neuter, the safer for your dog not to develop a whole bunch of ailments later in life.

- Avoid any unnatural, processed, industrial foods, and in particular dry foods.

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• Various chemicals in the water can induce cancer - if you are worried about the water quality in your area, consider purifying the water - eg with a Brita filter.

• Plastic bowls or plastic toys can also be possible sources of the carcinogens that lead to cancer. Avoid cheap plastic accessories.

Once a dog is diagnosed with cancer, the tumor should be removed with surgery where possible. This immediate treatment may have to be supplemented with a certain diet, exercise, medicine, or even chemotherapy. In any case, if the removed tumor was found to be malignant, regular follow-up examinations are highly advisable.

21. Non-Infectious Eye Problems

There are many potential Eye Problems among German Shepherds where the cause is not an infection but which may show as inflammation nonetheless. They may also entail an infection if untreated.

Distichiasis: Eyelashes that got stuck in the eyelid margin may cause eye inflammation.

Ectropion: Conformational defect resulting in eversion of the eyelids, which may cause ocular inflammation due to exposure.

Entropion: Conformational defect where eyelid margin inverts, or rolls inward toward the eye, causing eyelashes and hair to rub against the cornea and resulting in ocular inflammation.

Macroblepharon: An abnormally large eyelid opening may lead to secondary conditions associated with corneal exposure.

Persistent Pupillary Membranes: Persistent blood vessel remnants in the anterior chamber of the eye which fail to regress normally in the neonatal period.

Cataract: Like humans, dogs can get cataracts. If your German Shepherd is in good health, cataracts can be surgically removed, usually with good results.

Progressive Retinal Atrophy: PRA is a family of diseases involving the gradual deterioration of the retina. In the early stages of the disease, an affected German Shepherd becomes nightblind and cannot see well in dim lighting. As the disease progresses, daytime vision also fails. Provided that the affected dog's environment remains constant, an affected GSD can adapt quite well to this handicap. As the...

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affected dog's vision fails, the pupils become increasingly dilated, causing a "shine" to its eyes. The lens of the eye may also become cloudy or opaque, resulting in a cataract.

**Retinal Dysplasia:** This is an abnormality in the development of the retina. There may be no visual defect in affected German Shepherds, therefore Retinal Dysplasia can only be diagnosed when the eye is examined. It is a condition that is thought to be inherited. The condition may also be acquired as an injury or due to viral infections, toxins and nutritional disorders.

**Pannus:** This is a chronic inflammation of the corneal surface and, in most cases, of the conjunctiva of the eye. It's also known as Keratitis Ueberreiter, and almost only found in German Shepherds. It usually occurs at age three to five years. Without treatment, the inflammation progresses to cover the cornea and can lead to blindness. The cornea loses the transparency needed for sight (because of these pigmented deposits). Once started, it generally affects both eyes.

**Who Gets Non-Infectious Eye Problems**

It is believed that the eye problems mentioned above (apart from Distichiasis) are hereditary. This view is supported by the fact that some of them, like Pannus, have almost only been found in the German Shepherd breed. In this case, your only chance to reduce the risk of such Non-Infectious Eye Problems is to rely on the honesty of the **breeder** that they disclose if the dam or sire were affected by any of these ailments.

**Warning Signs**

The typical warning signs of an eye inflammation are redness around an eye, or on the cornea where the brown of the eye and the white meet, or in the white area. Look your German Shepherd closely in the eyes, and if you notice anything unusual, consider a vet appointment.

**Avoiding and Treating Non-Infectious Eye Problems**

I am a cynologist, not a vet, and I am not aware of genetic tests for these ailments. However, all breeding German Shepherds should be examined annually by a certified veterinary ophthalmologist. Most responsible **German Shepherd breeders** will register with the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) or similar local institution, and they will receive a CERF number for their dam and sire.

If you are adopting a German Shepherd puppy, ensure that the breeder provides you with copies of certifications for both the sire and the dam. In addition, you should ask to see a copy of the paperwork that was forwarded to CERF because the form may
report on other issues that may not deny the dog a CERF number but could be of interest to you.

When an eye inflammation or other eye problem does occur with your German Shepherd, the first treatment should be to help your dog's tear production with a natural and safe remedy - not with a cheap "Artificial Tears" product that dries out the eyes over time. Better use the self-activating and long-lasting i-drop.

If this doesn't improve the condition within about 24 hours, or if the condition looks serious to you from the outset, take your dog to the vet to feel safe regarding the cause of the problem and its possible treatment.

If your German Shepherd is suffering from Progressive Retinal Atrophy or Cataract, it may be worth trying these cataract drops. But note that they are expensive and will not help in every case (however, which medicament does that?).

The eyes are particularly delicate, and it's not funny to have a half-blind GSD that's bumping into something in your house all the time. Although German Shepherds can cope with partial loss of eyesight relatively well if you don't change their living environment, any loss of eyesight is very irritating and hence produces a lot of stress with successive ailments.

Dogs in general, and to a lesser extent also German Shepherds, don't cope with stress any better than a human being. Continued stress can lead to German Shepherd aggression and other German Shepherd problems. So, do try to avoid this with a weekly close look in the eyes of your German Shepherd and immediate vet treatment where serious.

### 22. Diarrhea

Diarrhea is the excessive and frequent evacuation of watery feces, usually indicating gastrointestinal distress or Digestive Disorder (see 5). While we humans can just run to the toilet each time we feel pressure on the anal muscles, your dog may have to wait for you to take it outside for a quick "walk".

This is the one situation where proper Dog Housebreaking incurs a problem: A housebroken dog is trained to hold on until it has reached the "relieve location" taught during Toilet training your dog. This training now puts huge stress on your dog in a Diarrhea situation. Imagine you were declined toilet use when you have Diarrhea!

**Who Gets Diarrhea**

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German Shepherds can get Diarrhea just like human beings, for any number of reasons. Let’s drill down. The three most common reasons are 1) a wrong diet, 2) contaminated water, and 3) anxiety.

The most common reason for a wrong diet is feeding a dog table scraps. While the human body can usually absorb the different forms of sugar, fat, grain, salt, spices, chemical emulsifiers, color and flavor additives, preservatives, etc relatively well, a dog’s digestive system and metabolism cannot. Every spoonful of table scrap brings your German Shepherd closer to the scrapyard.

The second most common reason for a wrong diet is feeding a dog industrial dog food. Naturally, the dog food companies market their products as nutrient-enriched and balanced diets. However, there are many flaws to this. First, industry-fed dogs on average seem to live 3 to 6 years less than home-fed dogs.

Second, it should be obvious that the metabolism of a Papillon that weighs 8 pounds and is kept in a one-bedroom apartment requires a different diet than the metabolism of a German Shepherd that weighs 80 pounds and gets 3 to 4 hours outdoor exercise a day. Nonetheless, industrial dog food is the same for all dogs, despite the packaging being different - that’s marketing, not food.

The third most common reason for a wrong diet is ingesting trash, poop, pee, and anything in between.

Finally, your German Shepherd can also contract Diarrhea if you change its diet abruptly.

The most common reason for contaminated water is that the water bowl hasn’t been washed and refilled with fresh water for days. Stale water is a very attractive breeding ground for various types of bacteria, worms, and viruses - especially when the water is warm and/or when it has accumulated outside substances like foliage, pollen, bird feathers or feces, etc - or simply dust from inside the house.

The second most common reason for contaminated water is that the tap water could be good enough for us, but may not be good enough for our German Shepherd:

Since digestion and metabolism of human and dog are different, it is not unusual that we have no problem with minor impurities of our tap water, while our dog has a problem with that (and vice versa). If you suspect this to be the reason for your dog’s Diarrhea (or other ailments), try tap water that has been filtered eg with Brita or similar. Never give your dog sparkling mineral water though, not even the mild form.

Finally, if your German Shepherd is suffering from eg separation anxiety (family members, friends, or neighbors can tell you), make it a dog training goal to cure your dog from this.

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Warning Signs

To identify whether your German Shepherd's Diarrhea is due to an upset intestinal tract or due to a possible disease, look closely in the diarrhea feces for signs of visible worms and parasites, for blood, mucous or colors that do not look natural.

If you see that the Diarrhea feces are moving or they look unreal (unlike what your GSD presumably ate last), then your dog's body is infested with parasites and you should take your dog to the vet immediately. Better safe than sorry.

Avoiding and Treating Diarrhea

To avoid Diarrhea, try to stick to healthy, natural, and varied dog meals, regular meal times, and a consistent feeding routine - as described in House Training a Dog. Serve two or even three smaller meals during the day, not one large meal. Do not make abrupt changes to your dog's diet. When you change the diet materially (say from industrial to home-prepared food), always mix half and half during the first week. Add boiled rice once or twice a week.

Use either the best Eat-Slow bowl or the best metal Eat-Slow bowl to help your dog's digestion and overall well-being.

Always provide a bowl of fresh water. Yes, day and night. Serve all food and drink at a temperature between room temperature and the dog's body temperature (as a rule, never hotter than 35 degree Celcius or 95 Fahrenheit). Try to serve it at roughly the same temperature each time.

Strictly avoid all table scraps, and prevent that your German Shepherd is scavenging outside. On-leash walks are not necessary for this, it is really just a dog training issue. With the right training, your off-leash GSD will not scavenge, even if there's an opportunity.

To treat Diarrhea, first do what you read under Warning Signs above. If the Diarrhea does not improve on the second day, consider to take a stool sample and to take your dog and the sample to the vet.

Don't give food during the first day of Diarrhea, but provide plenty of fresh water to which you've added the recommended dosage of electrolytes to replace those lost with the Diarrhea.

If your German Shepherd doesn't mind, mix half water and pure pumpkin juice (if it's industrial, make sure it has no added preservatives, sugar, etc). Again, add electrolytes as recommended on the package that you got specifically for situations like Dehydration (see 1), Vomiting (see 29), and Diarrhea. You MUST ensure that

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your dog drinks the recommended amounts to make up for the loss of fluids and electrolytes.

When you reintroduce food on the second day, start with a mix of half rice and half of whatever your dog got last - and together no more than half of the usual amount of food at that meal time. Continue with this during the entire day, hence two to three times - if you serve the recommended two or three smaller meals, rather than one large meal - if not, seriously consider this now. On the third day, return to the prior diet and amount of food.

Continue to add electrolytes to the water (or to the mix of water and pumpkin juice) for as long as your German Shepherd has Diarrhea. Make sure that the food and drink temperature is right (see above).

Once your dog’s feces return to normal, continue with the above for one more day, then return to sensible dog meals, meal times, and feeding routine as recommended in House Training a Dog.

Avoid processed industrial dog food for at least a full week after the Diarrhea has disappeared. If you had served your dog processed industrial food before, try to switch now. But always introduce a change in diet slowly: During the first week, serve half of what your dog got before, and the other half the new diet.

23. Degenerative Myelopathy (Degeneration of the Spinal Cord)

Degenerative Myelopathy (DM) is a hereditary autoimmune disease where the immune system attacks the dog's central nervous system. This attack leads to a loss of insulation around the nerve fibers (myelin) and of nerve fibers (axons). Once the nerves in the spinal cord are destroyed, the dog can no longer walk because, without nerve connections, muscles cannot work. The control pathways that make muscles work are located all throughout the spinal cord.

DM is an insidious disease, the symptoms of which rarely show up before the age of 5, and possibly as late as 14 years. The early stages of DM start with an almost imperceptible weakness in the hindquarters. In the last stage, the dog can no longer walk or even hold its balance when standing or squatting to defecate.

However, DM itself is not painful. There is zero pain because the nerve cells have died. The dog no longer feels its legs.
Who Gets Degenerative Myelopathy

German Shepherds are the breed that is most susceptible to Degenerative Myelopathy. Between 1 to 3% of German Shepherds are affected. In the USA alone, each year between 14,000 to 42,000 GSDs are diagnosed with DM.

Since DM is hereditary, this means that GSD breeders have not yet taken enough care to avoid breeding affected parents. This reinforces the importance of finding the best German Shepherd breeders when you select your next GSD.

However, as with most hereditary diseases, both the outbreak of DM and its progression seem to be triggered by environmental intoxication. This means that you can indeed delay the outbreak of DM and slow down or even stop its progression if you provide the right living environment for your German Shepherd.

Warning Signs

Recently the most important risk factor of DM, the defective gene, has been identified. It is recessive, which means both parents, the dam and the sire, must carry the defective gene for the puppies to develop DM later in their lives. A simple saliva-based genetic test was developed which can help determine the risk that a certain dog may contract DM later in its life.

This test costs only 65 USD. It is of course more relevant to GSD breeders who try their best to use breeding dogs without hereditary ailments, however you too might wish to know whether your German Shepherd carries the defective A/A gene combination. In that case note that even a dog that carries the defective gene combination will not necessarily develop the symptoms of DM before it dies, because this depends on environmental factors too.

During early stage DM, occasionally you can hear the sound of your dog’s rear feet nails scraping on the pavement during walking. Your dog will begin to show some difficulty getting up. If the dog is standing, it may have difficulty balancing, but it can recover on its own. If you turn your dog’s toes under, it may still be able to right its foot pad down, but response time could be lengthened.

As DM progresses, difficulty getting up and rear feet nail scraping will increase. The rear legs will cross under your dog’s body since it is losing sensation in its hindquarters - it does not know where it has actually placed its feet. Faulty perception of foot placement leads to tripping and stumbling.

When your dog is in a standing position, if you move the dog from side to side, using your hands, the dog will lose its balance and topple over. Often, you will notice exaggerated movements, such as high stepping when going up a curb. If you turn...
your dog’s toes under, your dog will no longer place its foot in the proper pad-down position once it can no longer feel its feet.

Soon, the tail will rarely become active and wag, however, because of the length of the German Shepherd tail it can become tangled with the hind legs.

Ultimately, you will need to help a DM-suffering German Shepherd to walk at all. Up until the terminal phase, DM can take several years but ultimately the sense of feeling is completely lost, and the dog then loses control over bowel and bladder too.

### Treating Degenerative Myelopathy

Although there is still no cure for DM or medication that would replace lost myelin and repair damaged axons, recent research has brought quite dramatic changes to the life expectancy and quality of life of dogs with DM. All these improvements are centered around the goal to provide the dog with a living environment that will at least delay, and possibly prevent, the outbreak or progression of DM.

Treatment of a German Shepherd with the defective gene combination should ideally start before the first symptoms become visible. In this case, in fact we are talking about avoidance measures - which may be successful to differing degrees.

Today's recommended treatment of DM combines four components:

- Exercise
- Diet
- Medication
- Other supportive measures

**Exercise**: The more varied the exercise is that you provide to your dog, the more you stimulate its various brain functions, nerve fibres and muscles throughout its entire body. Research shows that exercise and diet have the biggest impact when we try to delay or even to prevent the outbreak of DM. The exercise program should comprise weekly swimming and extensive walks but should give your dog a resting day between days of heavy workout to allow strained muscles and tendons to heal and to increase the build up of muscle strength.

In case you didn't provide your German Shepherd with much exercise in the past, you should slowly increase the schedule of alternative day exercise over the period of a month until your dog is fit. Also, if your GSD is already affected by DM, you may need to help your dog to get out of the water if it can no longer negotiate the bank on its own.

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Important is varied exercise. Should your German Shepherd then at some point contract DM, it is optimally prepared to substitute various body functions with others that are not yet affected.

**Diet:** We now know that the *right diet* also has a major impact on the outbreak and progression of DM. To give a dog the *right diet* is a key part of controlling environmental intoxication - which seems to trigger DM (and probably many other hereditary diseases too).

This is another reason why we are against processed, industrial dog food and why we stress so much the importance of *healthy dog meals, regular meal times, and a consistent feeding routine* on MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org. In particular German Shepherds with their sensitive digestion need the *right diet* in order to be healthy and happy. Only a healthy and happy dog can behave in a way that makes you happy too.

We cannot go into details here what the *right diet* for the German Shepherd is, but our MYGERMANSHEPHERD PERIODICAL will regularly feature this topic too.

**Medication:** Recently, two medications have been identified that seem to *prevent progression* or even result in *remission* of DM in up to 80% of affected dogs. These medications are aminocaproic acid (EACA) and n-acetylcysteine (NAC). For both substances exist cheap generic products, and they can also be compounded in a local pharmacy.

Both substances should be given orally - diluted with chicken broth (or other compatible substitute). Side effects can be Gastroenteritis (see 5), Vomiting (see 29), and increased bleeding time.

**Other supportive measures:** Since DM is an autoimmune disease attacking the nervous system, you must *avoid* standard heartworm medication (see 24) and flea medication (see 19) etc that increases immune responsiveness.

Stress reduction: For example, even minor invasive surgical procedures showed a marked increase in the progression of DM. Dental work can be most problematic.

Physical aids: If your German Shepherd is already severely affected by DM such that it can no longer use its hind legs properly, the Bottoms-up Leash or better the Walkabout Rear Harness or the Walkin Lift Harness should be a suitable physical aid. At a later stage, the best dog wheelchair may be useful too. Once your dog cannot walk at all, the only way to provide it with mobility may be the customized quad cart.
24. Heart Muscle Disease (DCM, SAS, Heartworm)

Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) is an ailment of the heart muscle. It's thought to be hereditary, however nutritional deficiencies of taurine or carnitine seem to contribute to the outbreak. Both the right and left chambers of the heart grow due to a genetic disorder, however one side can be more severely affected than the other.

When the left chamber grows, its ability to pump blood out into the lungs and body deteriorates, and fluid begins to accumulate in the lungs. In addition, the heart muscle soon becomes overloaded. This often leads to Congestive Heart Failure (CHF).

Subaortic Stenosis (SAS) is another ailment of the heart muscle. SAS is hereditary. With this condition, the heart narrows in the area of the aortic valve. The narrowing means that the left chamber must pump extra hard to get the correct blood volume through the narrowed area. This leads to a typical heart murmur sound that is one of the warning signs indicating that your dog may have SAS.

Note the difference: While DCM may develop during the dog's life, a dog either has SAS already as a puppy or it will never contract SAS.

A third heart muscle disease is common only in certain regions because it is inflicted by a parasite, the heartworm, which is spread by mosquitoes. The heartworm causes eg blocked bloodflow - primarily in the heart, lung, and liver.

Who Gets Heart Muscle Disease

DCM is not particularly common in the German Shepherd dog breed (the Doberman is most susceptible). However, the likelihood of contracting DCM increases with age, and usually dogs show the first signs of this ailment between age 4 and 11. Male dogs are more susceptible to the disease than female dogs.

SAS unfortunately is common with German Shepherds. Dogs that are born with SAS rarely survive beyond age 3 if untreated.

Heartworm-induced heart muscle disease is common in warm and humid regions where there are many mosquitoes. However, in areas with heavy heartworm infestation up to half of all dogs have become immune. This means, although the dogs still contract the heartworm, their self-defense mechanism prevents a spread and outbreak of the disease.

Warning Signs
The warning signs of DCM are lethargy, little interest in eating food, shortness of breath, coughing, abdominal distension, pale gums, increased heart rate, fainting, stumbling, or collapse. The dog’s breathing sound may also have a muffled or crackling sound due to the presence of fluid in the lungs.

Diagnosis of DCM is through physical tests, X-rays and ultrasound using echocardiograph imaging.

The first warning sign of SAS is the typical heart murmur sound that usually indicates SAS if the puppy is at least 6 months old and the heart murmur remains. The murmur is best heard on the left side of the chest at the level of the base of the heart, however it is famous for radiating its sound up the carotid arteries of the neck. The louder the murmur, the worse the obstruction of the aortic valve. Other warning signs are a dry cough that gets worse when the puppy is resting, lack of energy to play, and general lethargy with increased breathing while at rest.

Only ultrasound checks offer a reliable diagnosis of SAS.

The early warning signs of the heartworm-inflicted heart muscle disease are coughing, shortness of breath, fainting after exercise, tiring easily, loss of appetite, and nervousness. Diagnosis of the heartworm infection is through blood samples.

**Avoiding and Treating Heart Muscle Disease**

To help avoid DCM in your German Shepherd, stick to two or three regular, healthy and varied dog meals during the day, and provide regular, frequent and varied exercise. Avoid Obesity (see 25). You can also seek to prevent the triggering nutritional deficiencies of taurine and carnitine by giving your dog a suitable food supplement. Both Acetyl-L Carnitine and Taurine are available in pure powder form as natural supplements suitable for both human and canine.

Treatment of DCM is focusing on improving the heart’s function and to control the accumulation of fluid in the lungs through administering daily drugs. Again, Acetyl-L Carnitine and Taurine can serve the first aim, while fluid in the lungs (pulmonary congestion or pulmonary edema) should be treated and observed by a vet - who will (hopefully) start treatment by prescribing a natural diuretic (fluid reducer) similar to Aquadrene. Pulmonary congestion is indicated by a dry, hacking coughing at night.

Why the difference in suggested treatment (the nutritional deficiencies treated by yourself, the pulmonary congestion treated and monitored by the vet)? Because the dog's metabolism (and our own) would simply excrete any excess carnitine and taurine with the urine. Conversely, a diuretic withdraws together with the fluid essential electrolytes from the body, the extent and impact of which must be
monitored by a vet. Even Aquadrene only replaces some of those essential electrolytes.

Why can we not simply replace the electrolytes lost through the administration of a diuretic with commercially available electrolytes? Because the amount and variety of the loss of electrolytes through the administration of a diuretic may be very different to the loss of electrolytes as a consequence of Dehydration (see 1), Diarrhea (see 22), or Vomiting (see 29).

Finally, Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) as a common consequence of DCM can meanwhile fairly successfully be treated with the drug Pimobendan. However, as we would expect, its side effects can be severe.

Unfortunately, if the specific circumstances of a dog with DCM make the dog not responsive to the treatment with carnitine and especially taurine, then the dog's life expectancy may be as short as 6 months and is rarely more than two years from the outbreak of DCM. Luckily, as mentioned before, DCM is not particularly common among German Shepherds.

SAS cannot be avoided since it is present at birth. Treatment of SAS is focusing on creating a normal exercise tolerance to provide a normal life for as long as the dog lives. Drug treatment involves beta blockers like Atenolol that keep the heart from racing, however the side effects can be severe. An alternative treatment is surgery. Unfortunately, either treatment rarely extends the life of the dog beyond age 5. In other words, if SAS is treated, it may extend the lifespan of your dog by 2 years.

Heartworm-inflicted heart muscle disease theoretically can safely be avoided, however in practice this may be more difficult if you live in a warm and humid region where mosquitoes are present all year round. Helpful (but not safe) remedies are:

- Keep your German Shepherd indoors during dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Consider getting Bug-off screens for your windows and doors.
- Every other day, add two raw garlic cloves to your dog's meal.
- Spray your dog's coat with Repel Eucalyptus Insect Repellent if it works in your geography - Note that no insect repellent is equally effective on insects in every geography, since the mutations of insects differ widely between different geographies!
- If you spray your dog's coat with an insect repellent that is not as natural as Repel (note that Repel is not entirely natural - 70% of the active ingredient is a
biochemical pesticide), be aware of damaging side effects of substances like Cholinesterase inhibitors in standard insecticides. Even products containing the most used insect repellent, DEET, are not as safe as Repel Eucalyptus Insect Repellent (however, some of them last longer).

- Get the Thermacell Mosquito Repellent for walks with your dog, playtime in the garden, or sitting on the patio - Note that this type of repellent reportedly works on many more mutations of say mosquitoes etc. Allegedly this is the best one can do to fight mosquitoes - but it is more expensive too.

- You could also consider getting one or two of those Zap Rackets if you enjoy the added exercise.

- Consider treating your dog monthly with K9 Advantix, which repels and kills mosquitoes, ticks, fleas etc, and is the most effective combination of biochemical pesticides on the market - with minimal reported side effects. However, note that if such preventive medication is given to a dog that is already infected, a mild to severe allergic reaction may occur (which is why medication with such powerful toxins normally is a prescription product!).

- Have your GSD checked twice yearly by a vet for Heartworm-inflicted heart muscle disease.

- A strong metabolism certainly can limit the effects of any disease. Hence regular exercise and healthy dog meals, regular feeding times, and a consistent feeding routine will contribute their part too (see House training a dog)

- Also note that all drugs that you give to your German Shepherd over its lifetime weaken its ability to self-heal! The dog's body (and the human body even more so) have a tremendous ability to self-heal - but only if we let it! Instead, if we interfere, we automatically reduce this capability. All too often, the use of one drug today will require the use of another drug tomorrow - each drug inducing side effects that are likely to amplify over time - leading to further ailments and higher vet costs.

Beware of Ivermectin-based heartworm medicine such as Heartgard, Iverhart, Tri-Heart etc. Note that 65% of all reported dog drug reactions and 48% of all reported deaths are caused by heartworm medicine!

Treatment for heartworm disease is available, but costly and potentially dangerous. Treatment involves a series of injections to kill the adult worms. During this time the dog must be kept very quiet, as even minimal exercise may result in serious problems from the dead and dying worms. Once the adult worms are destroyed, the

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immature worms in the bloodstream must be killed too - unless the dog is receiving monthly heartworm preventives like K9 Advantix, which typically eliminate the immature worms after a few treatments.

25. Obesity

Much like for humans, the seemingly inoffensive Obesity is one of the most serious health problems that dogs get. As many as 40% of domestic dogs suffer from Obesity and concurrent ailments like Pancreatitis (see 5), although almost all cases are preventable.

If you serve your German Shepherd too much food per dog meal or unbalanced nutrition, or you don't provide a stringent regular exercise regime, your dog will become obese at some point. If your dog remains obese for months (or even years), it will start having trouble with basic exercise, develop breathing problems, and in the long term may suffer from Pancreatitis (see 5), Diabetes (see 28), Heart disease (see 24), Kidney failure (see 30), or any other organ failure.

Who suffers from Obesity

Obesity is caused by eating too much and exercising too little. There are however additional ailments that can cause Obesity (as you see in this Health Manual), so it is good to see a vet if your dog is having any trouble losing weight.

Luckily, German Shepherds rather rarely get obese anyway - probably because they are such an active breed with a strong metabolism. You will know that, even if you keep your GSD in your house, your dog is - at a minimum - running around as much as you allow. Indeed, German Shepherds get sick and develop behavior problems if they don't get demanding outdoor exercise each day.

Warning Signs

Early warning signs of Obesity are:

- Shortness of breath - exceeding 10 minutes after exercise ended, even when lying down
- Slow to get up - without the existence of a physical ailment, and before 10 years of age
- General listlessness and lethargy
- Your German Shepherd dog training is based on treats rather than praise
- You serve a bowl full of industry dog food - when you find the time
- Your puppy house training or dog house training didn't cover the important topic of dog meals, meal times, and feeding routine

Note that although the physical appearance of your German Shepherd, or reading scales and comparing it to standards, may provide an indication whether your dog is obese, from a medical perspective Obesity is an out-of-balance set of factors of the metabolism and organs. In other words, to your eyes your GSD may not look obese, nonetheless your dog may be obese in a medical sense (and vice versa).

That's why a vet won't just look at your dog, or compare scale readings, but they will examine your dog and consider factors like blood pressure and constitution, heart rate at rest and under load, dog meals, meal times, and feeding routine, exercise regime, living environment, etc.

Also note that even if you serve your German Shepherd only 1% more calories than it needs for your exercise regime, it can suffer from Obesity within less than a year.

Avoiding and Treating Obesity

The easiest way to avoid Obesity is that you serve your dog two or three smaller, varied and healthy dog meals a day, either in the best Eat-Slow bowl or in the best metal Eat-Slow bowl, at regular meal times and with a consistent feeding routine, that you always provide a bowl of fresh water, and that your German Shepherd will get its fair amount and variety of outdoor exercise each day. Never feed your GSD table scraps, and don't let it scavenge.

Weigh your German Shepherd on a monthly basis, and put the weight in relation to your exercise regime and its changes.

By all means, don't make giving treats a daily routine. Rather consider dog treats like human presents. How often will you give the same person a present? Don't compare dog treats with our human tendency to consume snacks during the day (or even during the night).

Dog treats are neither a nutritional substitute for an out-of-balance diet (as the dog food industry tries to convey) nor a sign of the love or affection you feel towards your

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German Shepherd (as they try to convey too). If you really want to provide balanced nutrition and show your love or affection towards your German Shepherd, stick to home-made *dog meals* at regular *meal times* with a consistent *feeding routine* (see *House Training a Dog*).

The *later* you introduce your GSD to getting treats, the healthier for your dog (1), the easier your *German Shepherd obedience training* (2), and the more unlikely that you will face *German Shepherd behavior problems* (3). In fact, in every regard, treats can be entirely substituted with praise, patting, and real-life rewards - an action your dog desires, see *Dog Clicker Training*.

Real-life rewards are for example to let your dog sniff on the ground for as long as it wants to sniff (sniffing the ground is a genetic dog behavior that you should never try to suppress), to provide your dog with extended outdoor exercise, to involve your dog in games like catch, fetch, jump etc, to let your dog out for an immediate walk, to let your dog run *off-leash* in safe areas (*crucial* for health and behavior), to provide a comfy place near you in addition to its crate place (see *Crate training dogs*), etc.

Likewise, the easiest way to *treat* an existing condition of Obesity is to reintroduce the advice given above. Do *not* give drugs against Obesity, *unless* the above hasn't worked within 6 months (which will *very* rarely be the case!) and your vet recommends the drugs.

### 26. Bladder Infection (Urinary Tract Infection or Cystitis)

Bladder Infection (Cystitis) or Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) usually means that harmful bacteria found their way from outside the urinary opening into the bladder (and soon thereafter to the kidneys, see 30), and these are now bringing the bladder's function out of balance. Other sources of Bladder Infection are ingesting stale food or infested water, or stones or a tumor in the bladder.

**Who Gets Bladder Infections**

All dogs can get several Bladder Infections during their lifetime if you don't make use of the avoidance measures below. However, generally female dogs are far more susceptible to Bladder Infections than male dogs, older dogs more than younger ones, and unaltered dogs more than (clean!) neutered or spayed dogs. In addition, the later you have your dog neutered or spayed, the more susceptible it is to Bladder Infections (and other ailments too).
There seems to be no evidence for a German Shepherd susceptibility to Bladder Infections. The many reported cases of German Shepherd Bladder Infections seem simply be due to the fact that there are so many German Shepherds, compared to other breeds.

**Warning Signs**

Typical warning signs of a Bladder Infection are:

- Sudden excessive water consumption (same weather and exercise level)
- Strain when urinating and/or urinating only small amounts at a time
- Urinating at unusual times or with unusual frequency (more often or less often)
- Urinating in inappropriate places
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue, listlessness, and lethargy
- Fever
- Foul smelling urine
- Blood in the urine
- Tender lower stomach area

If you notice several concurrent symptoms of these, make a vet appointment. If your German Shepherd seems to lose the ability to relieve itself, you must make an emergency visit to the vet, or your dog could die within hours!

**Avoiding and Treating Bladder Infections**

The following measures can help to *avoid* Bladder Infections:

- Make sure that your German Shepherd is drinking ample amounts of *fresh* water *each* day
- Take your dog out to urinate after a maximum of three hours (a puppy until 6 months of age after 60 minutes) to prevent the build-up of bacteria in its bladder - at night, when the metabolism is down, after a maximum of six hours can be sufficient
- Allow your German Shepherd at least 2 to 3 hours demanding and varied outdoor exercise each day - this will also help to stimulate the bladder

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• Avoid that your dog is wading through or even swimming in standing waters that may be infested with bacteria - even a slow-flowing river is safer than a pond

• Take your German Shepherd under an outdoor shower after each exercise, play, or walk in the countryside, after swimming, etc - as a rule, if any fluid or substance reached the lowest body opening, a more intensive shower is required

• Use a ph-neutral, natural dog shampoo, and carefully apply this with rhythmic movements (sparing all body openings incl. the eyes and ears)

• At the end, clean the bladder exit (and also the anal area, but with a separate washcloth), and finally apply a strong antiseptic spray around both body exits, using a new piece of washcloth each time

• Don't bathe your German Shepherd too often - between monthly and twice yearly is plenty - better use the outdoor shower and a natural dog shampoo instead

• Both to avoid and to treat Bladder Infections you can try cranberry extract in powder form to help prevent bacteria buildup in the urinary tract

Note that even if you adhere to all these avoidance measures, there is no 100% safety to avoid Bladder Infections altogether. However, number 1 and 2 alone seem to avoid over 90% of all conditions of Bladder Infections, so ensure that you follow at least the first two.

To treat a Bladder Infection, you should initially visit a vet so that they diagnose the ailment and its likely cause. They will probably argue in favor of using antibiotics (read the Introductory Notes 5 and 7 to understand why). However, because of the low success rate of antibiotics to treat Bladder Infections and their severe long-term side effects, you should aim for an alternative treatment instead. In addition, the mentioned cranberry extract in powder form seems to help better anyway.

Note that an otherwise healthy German Shepherd certainly has the ability to self-heal a Bladder Infection - provided that you give the right, natural assistance as described above. Antibiotics and other drugs seem inappropriate to treat Bladder Infections.

27. Soft Tissue Trauma (Soft Tissue Damage)

Dogs can get injured just as easily, if not more so, than we do. They get wound up, they play around, and they ultimately get injured because of that excitement - if

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you’re not careful. Soft tissue includes the muscles, tendons, cartilage, and ligaments surrounding the joints and bones, and this can be injured in any number of ways – through tweaks to the legs, running into objects or being hit by moving objects like cars or bikes. The severity of the Soft Tissue Damage will determine the treatment. Sometimes surgery may be required.

**Who gets Soft Tissue Trauma**

Theoretically, all dogs can suffer Soft Tissue Trauma, in practice however pet dogs kept in an apartment may never suffer one in their entire life. Conversely, the strong and agile German Shepherd breed is very susceptible to Soft Tissue Trauma if they are kept as outdoor working dog. The more intensive and varied the exercise and playtime that you offer your German Shepherd, the more likely that your dog will get hurt at some point. However, this should not be an excuse for you to keep your dog indoors all day apart from a brisk walk on the leash every so often.

Why? Because, although an individual Soft Tissue Trauma may look terrible, overall it is insignificant compared to all the ailments and problems that a "GSD-safekeeping" regime implies. Also, just like with us who won't shed many tears about an athletic injury suffered in team sport with friends, you can be sure that your German Shepherd will take it with composure if it gets hurt while exercising or playing with you. The appreciation of being with you and getting the mental and physical challenges it needs will outweigh the most serious Soft Tissue Traumas.

**Warning Signs**

Depending on the type of Soft Tissue Trauma, the damaged area may be swollen, or your dog may be limping or whining. Sometimes, German Shepherds will do neither, they will just get on with it quietly because they are not a bewailing breed like many others.

You will know your dog best - whenever it is less agile than usual, there is a reason for it. Inspect your dog closely to notice the cause. Also watch out where your GSD is licking itself. *Licking* can indicate a Soft Tissue Trauma, a Skin Allergy (see 19) or a Skin Infection (see 16), while *scratching* would indicate an allergy or infection only.

If your dog has clear problems with movements, the cause can be a Soft Tissue Trauma or an internal ailment (compare the warning signs of the other ailments in this Health Manual).

**Avoiding and Treating Soft Tissue Trauma**

The easiest way to *avoid* the most common causes of Soft Tissue Damage is to keep an eye on the environment where your GSD is exercising or playing. Hits by
cars and bikes are both most common and rather easy to avoid: Unless exceptionally well trained (see German Shepherd Obedience Training), keep your GSD on the leash while you two are near roads or driveways. However, let your dog run freely off-leash in the wide open space once you considered potential dangers.

A German Shepherd that gets lots of varied, regular exercise and is fit is less susceptible to suffer Soft Tissue Trauma than a GSD that is mentally and physically unprepared (and possibly overly excited) when you one day decide to have some play time or adventure time. Ideally, what you want is that your dog is so much used to all sorts of exercise and play that it remains calm and controlled and aware of its environment.

For this reason, do not follow the unreasonable "advice" you can find in too many cheap places, to make your dog a "leash dog"! By its very nature, a German Shepherd in particular is an agile guard dog capable of controlling numerous other animals. A GSD must be allowed to exercise its genetic roots. A German Shepherd requires a lot of freedom. If you don't like this, by all means get a Papillon or whatever.

Adapt the form of exercise to the environment. For example, if you are in difficult terrain where there are sharp objects on the ground (stones, wood, shells etc), don't make your dog run or jump at all. Consider that your dog has to go barefoot while you use shoesoles to protect your own feet against cuts, abrasion etc, and to cushion your ligaments, tendons, and joints to prevent strains.

So, let your dog determine the pace of walking in difficult terrain - or not to walk any further at all. Depending on the rigidity of your German Shepherd dog training you may actually notice that, being a guard dog for herding sheep, your GSD may try to lead you on a better path if you only let it.

Alternatively, get your GSD Full Feature Dog Boots or High Performance Dog Boots for this sort of terrain.

Treatment of Soft Tissue Damage is not always necessary. Like with us, Soft Tissue Damage will often heal itself as long as your dog is otherwise healthy and gets a lot of rest to allow for the healing. Therefore it is important that you never force your dog to walk, run, jump, swim, or whatever. Just because you want your dog to do this right now doesn't mean that your dog feels able to do this right now.

Your dog can't tell you "Ah, today my right shoulder hurts so much, I feel I have a strain, I cannot move my front limbs, just let me rest on a pillow". You can be sure, if a German Shepherd loses its agility, there is a cause for it. So, be considerate. If you are considerate with your German Shepherd, your dog will be considerate with you.
If your dog is limping a wrist wrap or hock holder may help, but if it is more severe a leg splint may be necessary. For hip or back problems, the back and hip support brace may help. However, unless you have orthopedic knowledge, you will probably need the vet for an exact diagnosis, so that you don't make things worse. Letting your dog rest a lot is the most important treatment upon Soft Tissue Damage. If your German Shepherd is in pain, you can of course consider to relieve its pain with the best dog pain medication.

Should you decide to visit the vet, your vet will probably want to take X-rays and ultrasound imaging. In any case, they too will then prescribe a lot of rest, and possibly some pain medication or medication to speed up the healing. The best dog pain medication helps with both, and is cheaper. Only very rarely surgery should be required.

28. Diabetes

Diabetes in dogs is the same as it is for human beings – the result of a deficiency in the hormone insulin, causing a decrease in their ability to metabolise sugars in their blood. It is the single most common endocrine ailment dogs can get and comes in two forms, like for humans.

Type I Diabetes is when the body does not produce enough insulin. Type II Diabetes is when the body stops being able to use the insulin effectively to process sugars.

Who gets Diabetes

There are strong indications for Diabetes to be hereditary, however there is no doubt that certain ailments - eg Pancreatitis (see 5) and Obesity (see 25) - certain medications such as steroids and glucocorticoids, and also viruses can cause Diabetes too.

Most often, Diabetes strikes between age 7 and 9, and more females than males - although spaying your female GSD as a puppy reduces the risk of Diabetes substantially. Overall, German Shepherds are less susceptible to contract Diabetes than other breeds in general (the Samoyed, Cairn and Tibetan terriers are most susceptible).

Warning Signs

Usually your dog will start to show various symptoms when Diabetes becomes an issue: A dog with Diabetes will be excessively thirsty and relieve itself more

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frequently, and it will lose weight despite eating more (same level of exercise). Lethargy is also common.

To actually diagnose Diabetes, the vet will need to do a full physical check for Urinary Tract Infection (see 26), blood glucose levels, blood count, and Pancreatitis (see 5), because a number of other diseases must first be ruled out before Diabetes can be confirmed.

Avoiding and Treating Diabetes

Avoiding Diabetes starts with the selection of a puppy from the best German Shepherd breeders who aim to select only a healthy dam and sire for their breeding program. This way you rule out the hereditary factor of Diabetes.

Next, make sure that you feed your German Shepherd only natural dog meals of high nutritional value - without all the preservatives, additives, colorings, thickeners and fillers, etc - and low in carbohydrates, sugars, and fats. Always supply a bowl of fresh water, day and night. Do not, I repeat, do not think "If I restrict the amount of water my dog gets, I don't need to walk my dog that often". If your dog can't relieve itself every three hours maximum when awake and after six hours when the metabolism is slowed down during sleep (and a puppy every hour), then you are asking for ailments like Bladder Infection (see 26), Bloat (see 4), Digestive Disorder (see 5), Kidney Failure (see 30) etc - all the way through to otherwise rare conditions such as liver disease, blindness, etc.

If you can't walk your dog that often, get a German Shepherd suitable dog potty.

Finally, regular exercise strengthens the metabolism of your dog which, among countless other benefits, will make an outbreak of Diabetes less likely.

Treatment of a dog that is diagnosed with Diabetes is very time consuming and costly, because you will need to administer regular insulin shots - lifelong - and you must ensure utmost compliance with the vet's recommended dog meals, meal times, and feeding routine (see House training a dog). Although there exist oral insulin drugs, these are not effective in German Shepherds because of poor absorption.
Treats, table scraps, and scavenging food outside can make an otherwise controllable Diabetes a life-threatening condition, therefore they must strictly be avoided.

In addition, certain drugs can no longer be administered when your dog has Diabetes. This means, if you can't prevent that your GSD gets Diabetes, you may not be able to easily cure it from other ailments later either.

29. Vomiting

Every dog vomits - and a lot more often than we do. It is a natural reflex of removing any foreign objects that it may have ingested. Scavenging is a major reason for Vomiting - unless untrained using rigid German Shepherd dog training.

For the most part you can ignore Vomiting, but every now and then it can be a symptom of something worse (compare the warning signs of the other ailments in this Health Manual).

Who Gets Vomiting Problems

Vomiting does not relate to a particular dog breed. Instead it relates to the specific health problems a dog may have. Acute Vomiting can be caused by a sudden change in diet or the ingestion of something your dog’s body cannot digest. It can also result from quick ingestion of food, particularly dry food. But hopefully you won't feed dry food anyway, and you help your GSD to eat slower.

Finally, parasites and worms too can cause Vomiting in your German Shepherd. Roundworms are particularly common causes of Vomiting, along with Giardia and Coccidia, which will sometimes show in the feces or vomit.

Warning Signs

If your GSD vomits repeatedly, it could mean that the digestive tract is blocked by a foreign object or that your dog ingested a poison. Obstructions will often be accompanied by Bloat (see 4) and a complete lack of movement as well.

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Note that it is rare that a dog vomits for a reason other than something it has ingested earlier. However, the Vomiting may start anytime from a second since ingestion to hours since ingestion. At night, when the metabolism is down, it could even start many hours after ingestion.

If Vomiting is a serious health issue, it normally is accompanied by other symptoms including Diarrhea (see 22), lethargy, behavioural problems and more. Additionally, if your dog vomits multiple times, it can be a sign of something worse.

There are two forms of Vomiting you need to be wary of: If your German Shepherd suddenly vomits multiple times, it could be a medical emergency and should be treated immediately. Also, if your GSD vomits every day or week, it could be a chronic issue related to an allergy or illness.

**Avoiding and Treating Vomiting**

To *avoid* Vomiting as much as possible, don’t give your German Shepherd *any* table scraps, train your dog *not* to scavenge, don’t serve large meals or dry meals, and always provide ample amounts of *fresh* water.

Ensure that your German Shepherd won’t eat fast. A fantastic remedy for this is the *technically best* Eat-Slow bowl (no wonder that it got so far *only positive reviews*). However, if you prefer *metal* bowls, you will have to accept the second-best remedy, the *best* *metal* Eat-Slow bowl. Whichever bowl you prefer, you can place it in an enclosed area (simple plinths fixed on the ground will do) - an area as large as you want your dog to move the bowl around (the more the bowl moves, the slower your dog will eat, but the more you may have to clean up).

Both the sturdy plastic Eat-Slow bowl and the *metal* Eat-Slow bowl not only substantially reduce or even eliminate Vomiting, they also significantly reduce Bloat and hence also the risk of Gastric Torsion (see 4). In addition, slower eating means that your German Shepherd will digest the food better, so that its metabolism makes better use of the nutrients in the food. This also means that your GSD will sooner feel full, will eat less, and will scavenge less. Finally, both bowls perfectly match our advice to serve your dog two or three smaller meals during the day, rather than a single large meal.

Don’t let your German Shepherd play with anything that could easily be ingested if your dog gets too carried away. All German Shepherd toys should be of suitable 1) *size*, 2) *weight*, 3) *shape*, and 4) *material*.

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Don't let your GSD chew on eg household items that may have a hazardous paint, varnish or other form of coating. Note that chemicals don't fade away when drying up!

To treat repeated or chronic Vomiting, you should visit the vet to determine the underlying cause. Obviously, cases of sudden Vomiting multiple times must be treated as an emergency because it shows that there is a persistent obstruction or adverse reaction to a substance your GSD has ingested. Just serving water is not a sufficient treatment and possibly not even an appropriate treatment in this instance.

If your dog has ingested a hazardous substance, in rare cases water may make it worse since water may not only dilute but disseminate the substance. Flushing the throat, stomach, and gut should always be left to the vet.

Where the cause is an obstruction, in rare cases you may have to help your dog to throw up the obstruction with a firm and targeted pat on the upper chest. This must always be done while your dog's mouth is facing down, so that the obstruction can more easily come out.

30. Kidney Failure (Chronic Renal Failure or CRF)

Kidney failure is the inability of the kidneys to remove waste products, toxins, phosphorous etc from the blood in the form of urine. When this happens, toxins will start to build up in the body, which will lead to various other ailments too.

Who Gets Kidney Failure

The typical cause of Kidney failure is simply ageing of the kidneys - CRF predominantly strikes beyond age 7. Additionally, some other ailments can cause Kidney failure, including Bladder Infection (see 26), Pancreatitis (see 5), Heart Muscle Disease (see 24), Obesity (see 25), a Tumor (see 20), and possibly even Hypothyroidism (see 17) and Diabetes (see 28).

While all dogs can suffer from Kidney failure, German Shepherds are more susceptible than some other dog breeds.

Warning Signs

Dogs that suffer from Kidney failure will often show an increased thirst followed by excessive drinking and increased urination. They will show severe lethargy and may even start Vomiting (see 29) with a fetid odor in their vomit and their normal breath. They will also often hesitate to eat and show signs of weakness as a result. Finally,

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affected dogs can show signs of depression and may lose general coordination while walking.

Avoiding and Treating Kidney Failure

To help avoid Kidney failure, where you can, ensure that your German Shepherd won't contract any of the initiating ailments mentioned above. The most important avoidance measure seems to be to give your dog plenty to drink every day and to allow it to urinate frequently.

In addition, of course you must avoid any situations where your dog has access to ethylene glycol - a substance in automotive antifreeze liquids etc - because this toxic substance induces Kidney failure.

If you suspect Kidney failure, you should visit the vet immediately. Although there is no actual cure for Kidney failure, early diagnosis will help treatment.

Usually, treatment includes advanced fluid therapy, careful management of blood abnormalities with intravenous drugs, special diet with phosphorous and protein restrictions, as much water as the dog can drink, and special care to make sure the dog has everything it needs.

Affected dogs may also need anemia management (red blood cells) and vomiting control with special drugs.

31. Kennel Cough (Infectious Tracheobronchitis)

Kennel cough is a highly infectious ailment that is characterized by heavy, honk-like contagious coughing. Since Kennel cough can indicate other more severe diseases and also lead to pneumonia, it is considered dangerous, and kennels and boarding locations often require vaccination before they would keep your dog overnight. However, note that there exists no single vaccination against Kennel cough since several viruses and several bacteria can be the cause of it.

Who Gets Kennel Cough

Dogs most likely to contract Kennel cough are those that have been held in locations with a number of other dogs, one of which was infected - at that time or earlier. Kennel cough can spread through the air when the infected dog coughs or sneezes, through direct contact, and also through contaminated surfaces (crate, blanket, toys, bowl, etc). Some of the pathogens that cause Kennel cough also cause much more
dangerous and even deadly diseases, and some of the pathogens can survive on surfaces for several weeks.

Hence, Kennels that do not frequently apply a rigid decontamination routine on their facilities (unknowingly) help spread this disease. Puppies are especially susceptible to Kennel cough as they can get sick much faster and more severely.

German Shepherds are however *not* particularly susceptible to Kennel cough.

**Warning Signs**

The early warning signs of Kennel cough are irritated eyes, a runny nose and sneezing. Snorting is particularly common after exercise or excitement. Three to five days after infection, the affected dog will develop the distinct cough - a loud cough that sounds like a honk - and this can then last between one and three weeks. The cough will get worse when the dog is active or excited, and it generally sounds as if the dog has something stuck in its throat. The affected dog may cough up fluid with severe bouts, and it may even vomit. Other symptoms include general depression, breathing problems, loss of appetite, lethargy, and sometimes fever.

**Avoiding and Treating Kennel Cough**

To *avoid* Kennel cough, be wary about where you leave your German Shepherd when you can't take your dog with you upon traveling. Make sure it is a safe location where dog health is on top of the agenda.

If you notice several of the warning signs mentioned above, visit the vet immediately. The vet will perform chest X-rays to check for pneumonia, as well as basic blood tests and fecal tests to rule out the chance of a parasite.

Kennel cough itself is not really dangerous - in an otherwise healthy dog it will eventually disappear with or without treatment. However, the reason why it must be diagnosed and treated immediately is that Kennel cough may indicate an infection by eg the deadly *canine distemper virus* (which is a carrier of Kennel cough too), and in addition it may also lead to other infections such as pneumonia. Therefore, you must really take care to prevent the spread of Kennel cough.

Depending in the planned environment for your German Shepherd (eg dog park, Kennel, or whatever), you may want to consider to have your dog vaccinated against the most dangerous pathogens of Kennel cough too (for example, the canine distemper virus). Visit your local professional vet well in advance.

To *treat* Kennel cough, the average vet will usually simply prescribe cough suppressants and antibiotics. You will also need to keep your dog away from other
dogs, minimize its exercise during the illness, and give it plenty to drink. Open your dog’s airway by removing the collar, and keep your GSD away from dust, smoke, pollen, etc. Take slow walks with your dog to provide lots of fresh air without the usual exercise regime.

Note that proper diagnosis is (always) crucial, since it will determine the appropriate treatment. Say, your German Shepherd has contracted Kennel cough through the canine adenovirus. Then antibiotics are ineffective (again), and antivirals are needed. However, if for example the pathogen has been the bacterium bordetella bronchiseptica, or if the Kennel cough led to pneumonia, then antibiotics are highly useful and an entirely appropriate treatment.

The earlier your vet diagnoses the right cause of the ailment, the more effective the treatment will be. This should limit the side effects (and overall costs) and put least strain on your German Shepherd.
This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!

However, to deal with minor dog health problems BEFORE they become major ones

Get “The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health” now

Please Note: As usual today, you may be asked to subscribe to the author’s mailing list, but you can unsubscribe straight away.
The overall goal of MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org:
To help you to have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd!

In your firewall, make sure that you can click the links in this pdf document, so that your browser will open up the linked pages. The links point either to content on MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org, or to the best remedies in your geographical area.

This means we make use of geotargeting, just like Google do. However, at the time of writing we have yet only covered German Shepherd owners in the USA, Canada, and the UK.

If you land on a seemingly unsuitable page, it means that there was no suitable remedy available in your country (most dog products are developed in the USA). Please send any questions here.

Note that any linked products have been thoroughly researched and compared. The links point to the remedies that are the most suitable or the most effective, and have the least side effects.

Experience is everything.

Similarly, often a certain supplier has shown to be the better choice because they offer a bonus to you, or a perk like lower shipping cost.

In no case was this decision subject to receiving a better commission for us: We know very well that we can only help you to have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd if we always focus on your benefit, not ours.

You can easily see this, because the majority of product links point to Amazon - although they give us the lowest sales commission: 4%.

In other words, if you kindly use our link to buy an item of say 20 dollar, we would (hopefully) get 80 cent sales commission.

However, whether you hate them or love them, because of their huge market power, Amazon often have the best deal for you - and that's why the majority of links point to them.

Nonetheless, the manufacturer itself may be the better choice if they offer some kind of bonus to you. Then we link to them. Example, at the time of writing: Ugodog with their dog potty and bonuses.

However, the market is always changing. Hence we welcome your feedback too if you know of a better remedy in your geography to avoid or treat a German Shepherd ailment.
Important Reminder

Please remember (see Introductory Notes for details):

1) There exist more ailments in dogs - the 31 ailments collected in this manual are just the most common for German Shepherds.

2) To keep your German Shepherd healthy and happy - and therefore yourself too - requires that you know of the most common German Shepherd ailments, typical warning signs, and common treatments. That's what makes this manual so crucial for every German Shepherd owner and handler.

3) With every ailment, you decide yourself at what point you visit the vet.

4) Take your German Shepherd to the vet for a checkup regularly, even if everything seems fine.

5) Only an experienced vet can make the right examinations, determine the real cause of any symptoms, and decide on a suitable treatment. However, you should play the role of your dog's advocate and focus on the long-term wellbeing of your dog, not on the cure of current symptoms. Hence you should aim to avoid all which puts unproportional strain on your German Shepherd, and all which is likely to have side effects that will require further treatments.

6) If you administer your GSD any prescribed antibiotics, then you must administer the entire prescribed course of treatment (10 or 14 days of antibiotics). Do not stop earlier, even if the symptoms have disappeared for an entire week.

7) Aim to choose a holistic vet. A holistic vet does not mean a homeopathic vet.

8) Avoid discussing with your vet that you've read up on the ailment yourself.

9) Never apply any ointment, lotion, powder, spray, etc close to the eyes, never in the ears, and never in the mouth or nose - unless it is specifically and clearly meant for this body opening! If this happens nonetheless, rinse well under running water, and if serious visit a vet straight away.

10) Never administer your German Shepherd two medicaments at the same time, unless prescribed as such by the vet.

11) Consider to have your GSD vaccinated against the most dangerous diseases that are prevalent in your geography.

Once you are subscribed to the free MYGERMANSHEPHERD PERIODICAL you will get many more tips regularly

!This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!

However, to deal with minor dog health problems BEFORE they become major ones
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Please Note: As usual today, you may be asked to subscribe to the author’s mailing list, but you can unsubscribe straight away.
Recommended Reading

The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health
By Mark Edwards

Get The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health now

The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health covers all the common health problems - both the serious and the merely annoying - that could affect your German Shepherd at some point. The overall focus is on being prepared and taking preventative action.

This guide teaches you how to accurately self-diagnose your dog - with the assistance of step-by-step flowcharts which tell you whether your dog will be fine if you give it time and rest, or whether your dog needs to visit the vet, and how urgent this is. Although this guide is packed with knowledge and advice from veterinarians and trained dog-care specialists, it's easy on the eye and easy to read. You can actually understand what they are trying to say!

In a nutshell, this guide has just the right amount of detail, it is comprehensive (it covers all the common ailments and illnesses), and it is knowledgeable - while retaining a conversational, easy-to-understand tone.

The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health gives you the kind of introduction to canine healthcare that will allow you to take good care of your German Shepherd - without spending unnecessary time and effort trying to absorb the jargon of a veterinary textbook, and without spending unnecessary amounts of money on vet visits where the condition will disappear naturally anyway.

What does The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health actually cover?

The book deals with all the common problems and ailments suffered by dogs. It covers issues from toothache and dental trouble, ear infections, skin rashes and chafing, eye irritations, worming issues, and lameness, to chronic problems like vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, asthma, breathing trouble, and liver problems, to the more severe issues like arthritis and cancer. It covers even symptoms like lethargy, behavioral changes, hair loss, etc.

On top of this, you also learn how to pick up early warning signs by identifying and accurately interpreting your dog's body language, how to groom your German Shepherd quickly and effectively, how to take good care of its teeth and gums, how to administer medicaments safely and easily, and how to recognize the early warning signs of health trouble through behavioral and physical changes. All this information

!This manual cannot replace professional treatment by a vet!

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is fully supplemented by full-color diagrams, photographs, and illustrations. It can't get any easier or more illustrative than this 240-page Ultimate Guide to Dog Health.

Actually, if you are quick they may still hand out the four bonus books too:

- **The Ultimate Guide to Dog First Aid** - which is an incredibly useful resource for those situations requiring an immediate response (including how to perform the canine Heimlich maneuver and dog CPR)

- **180 Gourmet Recipes for Your Dog** - which shows you how to indulge your German Shepherd's taste buds

- **101 Ways to Spoil Your Dog for Under a Tenner** - detailing all kinds of luxuries-on-a-budget and activities for you and your German Shepherd to enjoy together

- **20 Nutrition-Rich Recipes for Your Dog** - which proves that healthy dog food is easy to prepare and delicious for your GSD too

These four bonus books alone have a combined value of over $80 - not bad to get them as a freebie!

**The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health** - Summed Up

All in all, we couldn't be happier with this guide. It's exactly what we are looking for to take best care of our German Shepherd. Even if you've collected other dog health books already, you may still want to snap it up now, because it's so useful.

This is an information resource that every responsible German Shepherd owner, actually every dog owner in general, should have access to. Not only does it enable you to make educated decisions about the more serious health issues commonly suffered by dogs like the German Shepherd, you'll also learn a lot about the minor, day-to-day ailments and afflictions that almost every dog will encounter from time to time - as well as a host of useful facts on preventative care.

In other words, **The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health** really does help to **have the best lifelong relationship with your German Shepherd**. This comprehensive guide to dog health will help you to spot little problems before they become big ones, which makes it indispensable.

**Visit The Ultimate Guide to Dog Health now**
Enjoy your dog

Tim Carter - Founder MYGERMANSHEPHERD.org

Tim Carter
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