

About this “E-Book”

Welcome to the second edition of the Westie E-Book/website, sponsored by generous support from the [Westie Foundation of America](#). This electronic book is meant to serve as a source of information for Westie owners, breeders, veterinarians and for anyone who loves Westies.

The E-Book is organized as depicted in the Table of Contents. Links within the Table of Contents will take you to the topic of interest with a click of a button. The material is organized by topics of general interest, and then by specific diseases that often affect Westies. To help tie them together, the diseases are arranged according to the system of the body affected. Within the discussion of each disease, is information intended for all readers; where appropriate, we have included new illustrations and photographs to help clarify specific points. We also have included brief reviews of selected recent scientific publications related to each disease; this information may be of particular interest to veterinarians and scientists, but we’ve done our best to ensure that the major points are understandable by everyone. Finally, we have included lists of recent reference materials relevant to each topic area.

Health and Disease in Dogs – A Brief Overview

Dogs are amazingly hearty and healthy. The owner of any new puppy is amazed at the number of “delectable” items puppies eat – and how they grow and prosper.

There are several things that determine the health of all dogs. First, and foremost, dogs need a nutritionally adequate and complete diet, plenty of clean, fresh water, and a safe environment (See *Diet and Environment*, below). Second, dogs need humans to attend to their health problems. Owners of dogs are the front line in providing regular visits to the veterinarian for vaccinations and physical examinations (See *You and Your Veterinarian*, following page). Third, the breed of dogs can have a very strong influence on the development of some health problems. We know that some types of health problems, such as cancer or skin disease, are more common in some purebred dog breeds than others. One example of this is an increased incidence of bladder cancer in Scottish Terrier breeds, such as the Scottie and Westie (See *How Breed Influences Health in Dogs*, following page).

Diet and Environment

Revision by Korrin Saker, DVM PhD DACVN

Dogs prosper on many different diets. How can you be assured the diet you choose will provide adequate nutrition for your dog? The American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) has developed policies for regulating the manufacture, labeling, distribution and sale of animal feeds. The Nutrition Claim or Nutrition Statement on all pet food labels will indicate if and to what extent the manufacturer has followed AAFCO guidelines in formulating and testing that diet.

You will be able to ascertain, to some extent, if the diet is appropriate for your dog at a particular lifestage. Most

commercially available diets (dry, semimoist, or canned) are formulated to provide “complete” nutrition for a specific life stage. A separate category of commercial diets, termed “therapeutic or prescription diets”, are formulated to address specific health concerns. Diets that are formulated to provide “complete and/or balanced nutrition” do not require supplementation with vitamins, minerals or other nutrients for maintaining adequate health. Some owners prefer to prepare the diet for their dog using ingredients from the market. While homemade recipes have their place in pet nutrition, they can easily be incomplete or “unbalanced”. Therefore, it is important that you discuss your dog’s diet with your veterinarian to ensure that it provides all the nutrients the dog needs to maintain good condition. The National Academy of Sciences, Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources has created a 400-page report that summarizes the daily nutrient and calorie requirements for dogs and cats. The site also provides free access to the Science-Based Guide for Pet Owners, that is an excellent summary of relevant information. The website is worth a visit if you have questions about nutrition and diets for your Westie: www.dels.nas.edu/banr/petdoor.html

In general, most dogs thrive on the same diet – day after day. In fact, some dogs don’t do very well if their diet is changed, and will sometimes develop stomach upsets and diarrhea when this happens. Most owners realize that there are some dietary nono’s – too much food (exceeding body needs and leading to weight gain), doggie junk food and snacks, and fatty scraps. Although they love them, many dogs will get upset stomachs and diarrhea if they eat bones. Soft bones, such as those from poultry, may actually be a danger to dogs. These bones can be broken into sharp pieces during chewing and injure the digestive tract and mouth of dogs. All of these should be avoided.

Virtually all pet food companies maintain very good information on dog nutrition on their websites. They also provide information for dog owners on their products. Pet food websites and product information can be obtained by accessing the American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition (AAVN) website: www.aavn.org

Dogs need clean, fresh water. Dogs should have their water changed several times daily, and regularly checked by their owner for debris, cloudiness or discoloration that might indicate the water is unpalatable or potentially contaminated. Water bowls made of stainless steel are generally easier to keep clean and to resist chewing by enthusiastic dogs.

One of the most important things owners can do to ensure the health of their animal is to keep it in a safe environment. Dogs that are allowed to run free potentially may encounter other dogs with infectious diseases. Although Westies have the courage of African lions and will stand their ground against much larger dogs, they may get severely injured in dog or cat fights. Dogs that run free also run the risk of being struck by automobiles, ingesting dangerous substances (like antifreeze, for example), or being injured from falls or from malicious acts. So, keep your Westie safe!

You and Your Veterinarian

You and your veterinarian function as a team dedicated to maintain the health of your Westie. After completing undergraduate courses and being accepted into a veterinary school, they must spend the next four years in classes and being mentored during practice experiences before they are

able to take licensing examinations and begin to practice veterinary medicine. Most new veterinarians will work with more seasoned practitioners to hone their skills. Some veterinarians will take additional years of training (as in internship and residency training programs) to learn a veterinary specialty like dermatology, cardiology, neurology, oncology (the study of cancer), or orthopedic surgery. If you are interested in veterinary training or in the scope of the veterinary profession, several very good websites are maintained by The American Veterinary Medical Association (www.avma.org) and the American Animal Hospital Association (www.healthypet.com). These websites also contain a wealth of information on the health of companion animals (such as dogs, cats, and horses) and are worth a visit.

Regular visits to your veterinarian are critical in maintaining the health of your Westie. These visits allow the veterinarian to get to know your dog and to know you. The visits allow you to communicate to the veterinarian what a special dog you have and to allow the dog to understand the environment and examination procedures. It is well known that dogs that know their veterinarian and the practice environment are more at ease with visits. This lowers the stress levels your dog might have when going to a place where there are other dogs and cats, unfamiliar people and strange smells.

Regular visits also help the veterinarians in the practice do a good job in assessing the health of your dog, because they can develop a baseline of health and potential medical problems, detect diseases at early stages, and, most importantly, gain the trust of you and your Westie (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1 - Regular visits to your veterinarian's office will allow him/her to assess your dog's health status.