

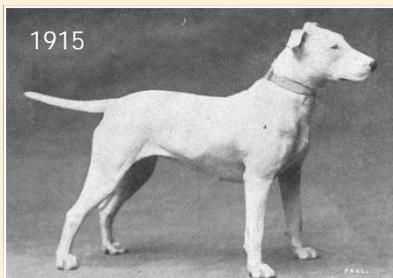
Holistic management for BREEDERS

By Karen Gellman, DVM, PhD, and Sarah Dayon, DVM



Building a better dog begins way before the parents ever meet! Breeders need a thorough understanding of the genetic consequences of their choices. You should coach your breeder clients to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their particular breeds, and to evaluate the conformational and genetic integrity of potential sires and breeding bitches. In the

show dog world, there is an unfortunate tendency to “breed to win” by tweaking a line’s morphology to align with popular fads among judges. This practice has been responsible for highly detrimental shifts in breed standards over the past 100 years, creating dogs that have significant health issues bred into them along with the desired looks.



Once a well-proportioned, athletic dog, the Bull Terrier has transformed discernibly over time. His thicker abdomen and unnaturally rounded head and snout are a consequence of selective breeding.

Why does the practice of dog breeding create so many inadvertent health problems? Through selective breeding, humans have modified size, coat, skull shape, ear type, tail carriage and other traits. But when looking at a variety of wild canids, and interbreeding populations of feral domestic dogs, a genetic blueprint for canids emerges: medium size, medium coat length, long tail, cone-shaped head, and upright ears. (For more information, see “Recovering canine health: the natural dog” by Michael W. Fox, DVM, and Deanna L. Krantz, IVC Journal, Fall 2017)



The bulldog’s ever-increasing size and receding snout has led to numerous health complications. In most cases seen today, medical intervention is required during the birthing of this breed as a result of its large skull.

In particular, changes in skull shape toward extreme brachycephalic and dolichocephalic dogs (as well as brachycephalic cats) has destroyed the health and functionality of breeds that were once exceptional working dogs and robust pets. Some breeds, like English Bulldogs, have such huge heads that they are unable to normally whelp and require a C-section for each litter. his breed is also known for dysfunctional bites, severe dyspnea and cardiac anomalies. Others, like Collies and Shelties, can be expected to have poor dentition and significant eye defects because of their excessively narrow skulls. Vets and breeders need to work together responsibly to prevent these unintentional cruelties.

