Skinny Black Dog Syndrome

(Not an actual clinical syndrome)

Although referred to as Black Dog Syndrome, Great Danes who struggle with their weight can happen to any colour although it is seen quite a-lot in Black Great Danes especially young Males.

Vets are typically unable to find any medical reason (although don't always do any testing or investigating) for the condition and most dogs go on to put on weight between 3-4+ years of age especially after de-sexing, some however struggle with their weight all their lives.

There are a number of sources that believe that this problem is caused by a digestive/absorption issue.

> *There are many different types of digestive disorders. Causes range from eating something other than pet food, to food allergies, infections or lack of digestive enzymes. Some breeds, such as Great Danes, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers and Collies, are more prone to particular digestive problems.*
>
> Source: http://familypethealthctr.com

The dogs physical structure

It is important to consider that the dogs conformation and breeding/lines could also be responsible for it not being able to put on weight simply because it cannot.

Fine racy slab-sided (no spring of the ribcage – appear flat on the sides of their body) Great Danes can be traced back for many generations. These dogs may never put on weight, basically because their overall conformation will never allow it (you see the same in tall thin humans).

Malabsorption is one condition that it is recommended you speak to your Vet about.

Malabsorption

Malabsorption is poor absorption of a nutrient resulting from interference with its digestion, absorption, or both. Interference with food digestion in dogs is typically due to lack of certain enzymes from the pancreas, called exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, whereas most cases of absorption failure are caused by small intestinal disease.

The signs of malabsorption are mainly due to lack of nutrient uptake and loss of nutrients in the feces. Signs typically include longterm diarrhea, weight loss, and altered appetite (loss of appetite or excessive eating). However, **diarrhea may be absent even when disease is severe**.

Weight loss may be substantial despite a good appetite, sometimes characterized by eating of feces. Dogs with malabsorption usually appear healthy in other respects unless there is severe inflammation or cancer. Nonspecific signs may include dehydration, anemia, dark blood in the stools, or fluid retention. A veterinarian may be able to detect thickened bowel loops or enlarged abdominal lymph nodes.

Diagnosing malabsorption can be complex, because longterm diarrhea and weight loss are signs that are common in several diseases, including malabsorption. An exact diagnosis may take more than a single visit. A thorough examination is needed for dogs with signs of malabsorption to determine whether the signs are caused by an underlying generalized or metabolic disease.

Certain tests can help determine whether the signs are due to a condition such as inflammatory bowel disease liver disease, or parasites. The dog's history is particularly important because it may suggest a specific food allergy, consumption of non-food items, or other sensitivity. Weight loss may indicate malabsorption or protein-losing disease but may also be due to loss of appetite, vomiting, or a non-digestive disease. There are certain features that help distinguish small--intestinal diarrhea from large-intestinal diarrhea. Suspected large intestine disease in dogs may be further evaluated by a biopsy of the intestinal lining. However, if signs are accompanied by weight loss or large volumes of feces, then the small intestine is probably also affected.

Treatment of malabsorption involves dietary change, management of complications, and treatment of the cause, if it can be identified. If malabsorption is caused by exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, treatment involves feeding a special low-fiber diet that contains moderate levels of fat or highly digestible fat, very digestible carbohydrate, and high-quality protein.

Supplementation with pancreatic extract to provide missing enzymes is also necessary. If the dog's response to pancreatic replacement treatment is poor, small-intestinal bacterial overgrowth may be suspected. In this case, the dog may be treated with oral antibiotics for about 1 month to reduce the

bacterial overgrowth. Effective treatment of small-intestinal disease depends on the nature of the disorder, but when a specific diagnosis cannot be made, treatments may be given on a trial basis.

Dietary modification is an important aspect of the management of small intestinal disease. Your veterinarian may recommend feeding your pet an exclusion diet consisting of a single protein source (one to which your dog has not previously been exposed) as a test when dietary sensitivity is suspected.

It is very important that you provide the special diet and prescribed medication(s) for your pet exactly as instructed. Often, owners are tempted to provide a "special treat" not on the diet even though they have been instructed not to do so.

Failure to follow the prescribed diet can delay diagnosis and delay the treatment their pet needs. Owners can reward their pets during this time with petting, a new blanket or suitable toy, or some other reward that is not food. Often the best reward for the pet is extended periods of attention.

Checklist

Step 1: Book in to see your Vet if the condition has been going on for some time. If your Vet does not wish to do any testing or investigation let them know you would like the condition to be investigated further i.e. possible Malabsorption, inflammatory bowel disease liver disease, or parasites etc.

Step 2. Worm your dog monthly. If you use the same worming treatment all the time you will need to consider changing to a different brand as worms build resistance to brands.

Step 3: Look at your dog's diet, investigate the ingredients of what your dog is fed, are they high quality ingredients with minimal fillers etc. Investigate the ingredient panel about what chemicals, flavouring and additives are on your dog's food that could be causing digestion problems.

Consider:

1. Stay Loyal: http://www.stayloyal.com.au/
2. Blackhawk: http://www.blackhawkpetcare.com.au/

See: www.greatdanerescue.com.au/downloads.htm for more information on dog food ingredients under the 'Health' section.

Consider: What commercial treats you are feeding your dog and what ingredients they contain. Could you cook your own treats i.e. cut up piece of chicken or steak etc.

Step 4. Consider placing your dog on a digestive aid, there is no harm in doing so.

Recommendation: DR GOODPET DIGSTIVE POWDER CANINE

Available from: http://www.greenpet.com.au/products/DR-GOODPET-DIGESTIVE-POWDER-CANINE.html

Product write up:

Canine Digestive Enzymes™ "Top Pick" Whole Dog Journal. Even when we feed our dogs the best possible diet and provide vitamin and mineral supplements, many animals still do not attain the anticipated level of health.

The reason could be a deficiency of digestive enzymes. Veterinarians and pet nutritionists often find such deficiencies and recommend digestive enzyme supplements.

By aiding in the breakdown of food, these supplements help animals absorb more nutrients from their diet.

The results, according to the experts, include improved hair coat and skin, resistance to illness, vigour and mobility, and maintenance of good body weight.

Research shows a strong link between enzyme deficiency and disease. Some typical signs to look for are unusual odour or consistency of the stool, animals who eat their own faeces and animals who are clearly underweight despite big appetites.

Recommendation: Protexin Liquid

Available from: Most online dog/horse pet shops.

Product write up:

The digestive system plays a vital role in the health, vigour and performance of horses. Its correct functioning is dependent on the level and balance of bacteria and yeasts called microflora. Microflora have the major role in breaking down indigestible nutrients, in the synthesis and absorption of vitamins and minerals, in stimulating the immune system and in preventing the proliferation of pathogens in the gut.

Stress, in all forms is one of the major causes of disruption to the normal balance of microflora in the gut, allowing proliferation of pathogens. Loss of appetite, picky eating, scouring, poor condition and changes in temperament are some of the less

consequences. Stress is easily induced with some common causes being: changes in diet, heavy work or training, temperature extremes, breeding, transportation, worming, vaccinations and changes to environment. Use of PROTEXIN® in these circumstances protects dogs from negative intestinal changes while improving digestive efficiency and general health.

Antibiotics are particularly harmful to gut microflora, leaving dogs susceptible to re-infection. PROTEXIN® should always be administered following any course of antibioticss

Step 5. Minimise your dogs stress. Stressy tend to have problems with their digestion.

Consider: **PetArk Calm** supplement, available from:
http://www.k9pro.com.au/products/PET-ARC-CALM.html

Adaptil collar, always most affordable on eBay.
They contain D.A.P. (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) and offer a natural and convenient way to help manage stress-related behaviour in your dog. Designed to provide comfort to puppies and adult dogs in stressful situations.

It is important to note temperament has a genetic component and Great Danes who are born highly strung may not be able to be assisted by supplementation.

Step 6. If your dog does not like to eat much ensure you only leave the food down for 15 minutes and then remove. It may take a week or 2 for the dog to start eating properly however free-feeding (leaving food down all the time) doesn't help the situation as they can become fussier.

Consider fasting (not feeding your dog) for 24 hours to try and kick start their appetite. Fasting is safe for most dogs, check with your Vet if you're concerned.

Warm the meal up, dogs prefer warm meals vs something out of the fridge.

Trick the dog by only putting in their bowl what you know they will eat and then slowly add to it over time.

Consider that they do not like the food you are feeding them.

Will they eat something like dog roll or canned food? Although junk food in many cases this can be a good indicator to see if they are just being fussy.

Speak to your vet about medications that increase appetite.

Move the dogs bowl to another location to see if that may work i.e move it inside from outdoors. The dog may need you to be near it whilst it eats as well.

Make dinner time as stress free as possible, some dogs may benefit from being fed away from other dogs where some may benefit from the competition of having another dog in the same room whilst eating (if there is no history of food aggression).

Step 7. Still having problems after trying all of the above? Time for some alternative testing perhaps?

Consider:

Nutriscan – Gold Standard food sensitivity test. Purchase online from America and you will be sent a mouth swab kit which you send back and results will be e-mailed to you.
http://nutriscan.org/

Bio-compatibility test - This test is completely non-invasive and painless. It involves only the collection of a small sample of your pet's fur. No needles or blood samples.

Many animals suffer from allergies and this can be the result of eating bio-incompatible foods over a period of time. Allergic reactions are accumulative and a visible reaction may not take place for up to four days. Often animals will crave the very foods they are allergic to.
http://www.greenpet.com.au/products/BIO%252dCOMPATIBILITY-TEST-%252d-ANIMALS.html#reviews

Hair Mineral Analysis test - Hair testing is the most effective, non-invasive method for testing mineral levels in the body. Minerals are important for correct function of many organs and glands.
http://www.greenpet.com.au/products/HAIR-MINERAL-ANALYSIS-%252d-ANIMALS.html

Step 8. Work with an Animal Naturopath for diet and supplementation to try and get your dog on the right path for future health.
http://www.greenpet.com.au/products/FULL--NATUROPATHIC-CONSULTATION.html