

THE WEST HIGHLAND WHITE TERRIER

Breed characteristics

When thinking of buying a West Highland White Terrier (Westie) it is a good idea to read some literature about the breed to see if it will fit in with what you want in a pet. They are a terrier and not a toy dog. They are a very intelligent breed and need to keep their brains occupied. Westies can have a will of their own but are also keen to please their owner. You must however be firm with them so they know you are the pack leader and not them. With proper training they make wonderful pets.

Westies and Children

Westies generally get on well with children but you must be careful that the child is not allowed to manhandle the puppy. The puppy is tiny at 8 weeks old and they may hurt it. In addition, if the child hurts the puppy it may retaliate and then be labelled as vicious when it is not their fault. As with most puppies of any breed, they will chew anything and their teeth are like needles so be prepared to ensure the puppy knows not to bite fingers, toes etc. If they are chewing or biting, tell them very firmly "no" and if possible give them a toy that they are allowed to chew.

Care of the Coat

The Westie coat needs attention; their coat grows and needs regular grooming. They will also need to visit the grooming parlour about four times per year for trimming. They have a dense furry undercoat and a harsh outer coat. If you get your Westie clipped then he or she may well lose the harsh texture to the outer coat. Most pet owners have them clipped; it is very hard to find a groomer who will hand strip the coat which is what is required to keep it harsh. If you are grooming your Westie, use both a brush and a wide tooth comb. You must get through the undercoat as well as the top coat otherwise the coat will become matted which can lead to skin problems as well as discomfort for the dog.

Care of the Puppy

When you get your puppy it will probably be 8 weeks old, at this stage they require feeding four times daily and frequent trips outside to the toilet to enable you to housetrain them. They also require human company and it is not a good idea to have a young puppy if you are out at work all day, it is unfair to the puppy. You should ask the Breeder has the puppy been wormed, and what it has been fed on. All puppies should have been wormed by the time they are ready for their new homes, it is also a bad idea suddenly to change their diet. The Breeder should give you a diet sheet and probably enough food to last a couple of days. You should take the puppy to your vet for examination soon after getting it to ensure it is healthy and to have his or her first vaccination if this has not been given already.

Paperwork for Your Puppy

When you get your Westie (or any other breed you choose), you should receive the Kennel Club Registration Certificate. Sometimes this is not back from the Kennel Club and in those cases get something in writing to say the registration will be forthcoming. You also normally get a pedigree with your puppy and some breeders will provide insurance for the first 6 weeks of the puppy's life. It is up to you at the end of that time to decide if you want to continue with the insurance. It is a good idea as if Westies are going to develop any health problems particular to the breed they will usually appear in the first year of its life.

Health Problems

Westies are generally healthy animals but as is the case with many breeds of dog, there are some conditions that crop up from time to time in the breed.

They are as follows:-

Skin problems - many conditions come under this umbrella

Dry Eye - this is where the eye does not produce enough tears and they will require drops for it

C.M.O. - this involves an over production of calcium generally in the jaw which causes pain when eating. It will often appear when they start to change their teeth. It can be cured by anti-inflammatory medication and they normally grow out of it by 1 year old. There are no long-term affects from it.

Leg Perthes - this condition involves the head of the femur not fitting correctly into the socket, an operation is usually necessary but the puppy will live a normal healthy life with no after affects. Again, this normally appears in the first year of life

The following is a link to the American Westie Club site where you can read in depth about many conditions. Please do not be alarmed they are not common but they are known in the breed.

<http://www.westieclubamerica.com/health/concerns.html>

Other useful links are

www.northernirelandwesthighlandwhiteterrierclub.co.uk

www.southernwesthighlandwhiteterrierclub.co.uk

www.thewesthighlandwhiteterrierclubofengland.co.uk