

WELFARE PROBLEMS WITH FLAT FACED DOGS AND CATS - BRACHYCEPHALIC BREEDS

In this fact sheet, we want to draw attention to the severe, hereditary health problems in extremely short-nosed animals that have been in vogue for several years.

It is important to change the way we are thinking about breeding and acquiring brachycephalic animals.

Pets like dogs and cats have always been subject to certain fashion trends.

Especially breeds expressing characteristics like a round head, googly eyes and short muzzles have been popular for a long time since these traits are considered by many people as particularly cute and have therefore been in high demand as pets.

Unfortunately, the health of these animals completely recedes into the background.

The extreme manifestations of visual characteristics can lead to extreme suffering, which can be summarized under the term of '**Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome**':

- The **muzzle** was bred shorter and shorter which leads to **teeth** deformations
- The **nose** has receded to a small remnant and thus can no longer fulfill its function to the full extent. The nostrils and nasal cavities are narrowed resulting in the animals receiving a decreased amount of oxygen which leads to shortness of breath, often described as snoring or grunting
- Furthermore, the cute "childlike" appearance can only be achieved by a **deformed skull**. This means that the eyes sit in much too shallow eye sockets and can pop out
- Another problem are neuronal failures that are caused by the **brain** being pressed against the bony border of the too small skull

- Further issues occur within the airways: Due to the short snout and short facial skull, the **soft palate** protrudes into the throat and constricts the airways. Often the **trachea** also collapses during breathing, resulting in respiratory distress and hypoxia
- Additionally, the **eyes** are often painfully irritated by the **wrinkles** created by the shortened nose, and the animals often suffer from eye infections, corneal ulcers and subsequently blindness

It is important to be aware that these problems exist at every second of a brachycephalic animal's life and are even potentiated when the animal is under physical stress. They may occur singly or in combination and impair respiratory function, resulting in variably loud, snoring breathing and, in severe cases, profound respiratory distress, blue discoloration of mucous membranes (cyanosis), and collapse. Summer temperatures worsen the symptoms and can lead to fatal choking attacks.

DOG breeds that are affected are:

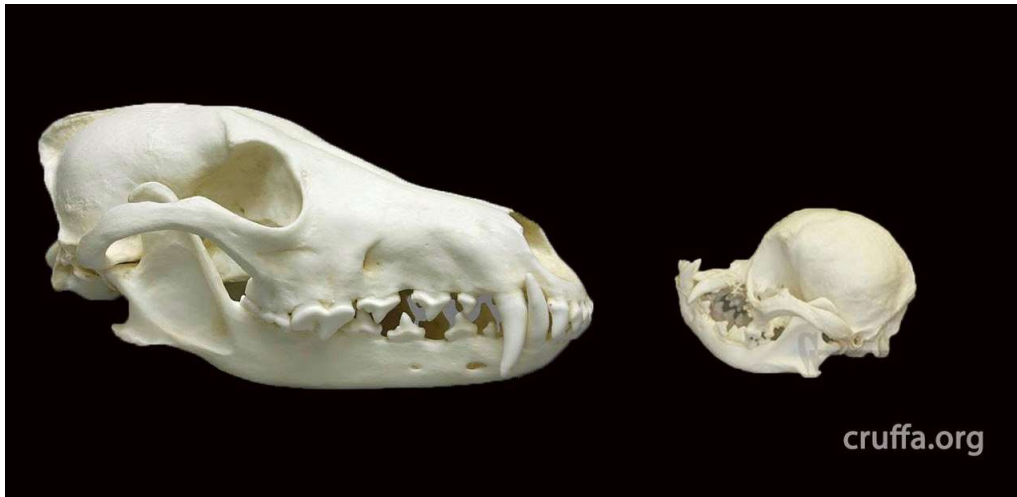
French Bulldogs, Bulldogs, Boxers, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Shih Tzus, Boston Terriers, Mastiffs, Pugs

CAT breeds that are affected are:

Persian, Exotic Shorthair, Himalayan

Scottish Fold, Burmese and British Shorthair (often to a lesser degree)

Comparison of a normal dog's skull and the skull of a pug:



© <https://dog.international/>

Comparison of a normal dog's upper jaw and the upper jaw of a pug:



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Is it possible to treat the respiratory distress in these animals?

Yes, usually attempts are made to surgically remove the airway constrictions in several places:

- the soft palate is shortened
- excessively narrow nasal openings are widened

- in some animals, in the larynx, the protruding laryngeal pockets are removed
- In the case of a collapsing trachea a stent can be implanted to keep the trachea open

However, success is not always satisfactory, and previous surgical methods often do not produce the hoped-for improvement in cases of severe respiratory distress.

What should I pay attention to if I want to get a puppy/kitten?

If you are planning to adopt a dog or a cat, do a quick check to see if the animal is suffering. If even one of the following features applies, it is not recommended to purchase the animal, especially not out of pity.

DOGS:

- the dog is out of breath during a short sprint
- snorting or rattling breathing, snoring when at rest
- very fast breathing
- heavy panting even in moderate temperatures
- extremely protruding eyes
- The dog squints
- severe wrinkling on the bridge of the nose

CATS:

- the mother animal snorts, rattles or snores during resting
- the mother animal has "tear marks"
- the mother animal has folded ears
- no tail from birth
- squinting or twitching eyes
- apathetic behavior, uncontrolled movements
- Persistent screaming

Be a responsible pet owner and don't support the breeding and advertisement of brachycephalic animals' breeds. Only when irresponsible breeders can no longer find buyers a change towards breeding healthier happier animals can be achieved. We are happy to offer you veterinary advice when planning on getting a new animal.

For more information please also refer to:

Cambridge BOAS Research Group (fb),
www.spca.nz/advice-and-welfare/article/the-truth-behind-brachycephalic-breeds-appearance-over-welfare