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Why Do Dogs Pant?

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Don't you just love playing fetch with your dog? It's such a joy when she comes bounding back to you, toy in mouth, tongue lolling out, waiting for the next throw -- often as she pants heavily. But why exactly do dogs pant? Here are a few of the more common reasons.

Dogs Aren't Like People

Obviously, dogs have a vastly different physiology than people. For one thing, dogs have fur -- the equivalent of a coat. Imagine you're running around in the hot sun, with a coat on, and you can't take it off! After a while, you'd start to sweat and look for something to drink -- the cooler the better.

To Cool Down

Once their body temperature rises, dogs can't sweat through their skin like we do to cool off. Dogs do sweat through their paw pads, but it's by panting that dogs circulate the necessary air through their bodies to cool down. If you're near a body of water (like the beach), your dog can also regain her "cool" by jumping in.

Dangerous Signs -- Heatstroke

Panting is a sign that your dog is excited, hot, or both. But panting is also a warning sign. If your dog is taking a break from exercise and continues to pant heavily, this could be a sign of heatstroke -- a medical emergency. Move your dog to a cool spot or indoors immediately. When playing with your dog outside in hot weather, it's vital to bring along water for her to drink too.

Dangerous Signs -- Poisoning, Allergic Reaction

Panting can also be an important sign that something is physically wrong with your dog, especially if there is no discernible reason as to why she is panting. When accompanied by other signs like lethargy and vomiting, panting can be an indicator that your dog has ingested poison or is having a severe allergic reaction that is affecting her ability to breathe. This is especially important to watch out for if your dog is on any kind of medication.

Dangerous Signs -- Illness

Another possible reason your dog suddenly starts to pant is as a symptom of illness. A sudden increase in heart rate and panting to catch her breath can be a warning that your dog has a heart problem. Other illnesses that can cause your dog to suddenly start panting include respiratory problems like pneumonia and Cushing's syndrome (adrenal glands producing too much cortisol).

Head for Cover!

While relaxing indoors, a dog may suddenly start panting if an electrical storm passes by. This is a normal fear response -- dogs are easily startled by loud noises and bright flashes of light (such as with thunder and lightning). Dogs also look to people to know how to act, so if you act normal during a storm, they'll be less prone to panic. Still, if your dog feels the need to hide under the bed (or under your legs), allow her to do that until she feels that the worst is over.

Hot weather, getting spooked, or not feeling well -- dogs pant for all these reasons and more, including when they're injured and in pain. By learning your dog's behavior and taking good care of him or her, you'll be able to tell the difference between "a breather" and a serious medical condition.

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No

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PET'S NAME

PET TYPE DOG CAT

BREED

--please select--

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