

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS IN DOGS



Bronchitis refers to **inflammation of the larger airways** (called bronchi) in the lungs. These airways branch from the windpipe (trachea) and carry air into smaller tubes and finally to tiny air sacs (alveoli), where oxygen is absorbed into the bloodstream.

When these larger airways become **irritated—by infections, smoke, pollution, or other triggers—they respond with inflammation**, which leads to excess mucus production. This mucus can block airflow, causing **coughing**. Coughing itself leads to more irritation and inflammation, creating a **cycle of ongoing airway damage**. When this process continues for an extended period, we call it **chronic bronchitis**.

What Makes Bronchitis "Chronic"?

Chronic bronchitis is defined as a **daily cough that lasts for two months or more** and has no other identifiable underlying cause. It is **not contagious** and is **not the same as kennel cough** (which is usually caused by infection).

How is Chronic Bronchitis Diagnosed?

Because there are many causes of chronic cough in dogs, it's important to **rule out other conditions**, such as:

- Pneumonia
- Tracheal collapse
- Heart disease
- Lung cancer
- Heartworm infection

Asthma, while common in cats, is **rare in dogs**.

Diagnostic tools may include:

- **Chest X-rays:** to check for airway changes or other lung diseases. In chronic bronchitis, we may see patterns like "tram lines" or "doughnuts" from thickened airways.
- **Tracheal wash or bronchoscopy:** to collect samples from the lungs for testing.
- **Blood and heartworm tests.**
- **CT Scan**

Sedation or general anaesthesia may be needed for some of these procedures, and your vet will carefully weigh the risks and benefits.

Treatment Options

While chronic bronchitis is **not curable**, its symptoms can often be **well-managed with ongoing care**.

1. Cough Suppressants

If the cough is dry and non-productive, suppressants such as **hydrocodone** or **butorphanol** may help your pet feel more comfortable. These are prescription-only medications. Never give human cough medications without veterinary advice.

2. Corticosteroids

Steroids like **prednisolone** reduce airway inflammation and mucus production. They're usually started at a higher dose and tapered down. Long-term use may cause increased appetite, thirst, urination, and muscle changes.

To reduce side effects, **inhaled steroids** (such as fluticasone) can be used. A pet inhaler and mask system delivers medication directly to the lungs with fewer body-wide effects.

3. Airway Dilators

Although airway narrowing isn't the main issue in bronchitis, **bronchodilators** (medications that open up the airways) can help improve breathing when mucus is present.

4. Antibiotics

Chronic bronchitis is **not caused by infection**, but inflammation can increase the risk of secondary bacterial infections. Antibiotics may be used if infection is suspected.

Supportive Therapies

Nebulization & Coupage

Using a **vaporizer or nebulizer** helps loosen airway secretions. **Coupage** (gently tapping the chest) can help move mucus into the larger airways where it can be coughed up.

Weight Management

If your pet is overweight, it can put extra pressure on the lungs and worsen symptoms. **Weight loss alone may significantly improve breathing.**

Environmental Control

- Avoid **smoking** near your pet
- Use **harnesses** instead of collars to prevent airway pressure
- Minimise exposure to **dust, sprays, and chemicals**

Ongoing Management

Chronic bronchitis is usually **a lifelong condition**, but with regular monitoring and adjustments to treatment, **many dogs live comfortably for years.**

Please speak with us about:

- Inhaler training for your pet
- Long-term monitoring plans
- Strategies to reduce environmental triggers

When to Contact the Vet



Call us if you notice:

- Worsening or frequent coughing
- Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Lethargy or poor appetite
- Changes in gum colour (e.g. blue or pale)

We are here to support you and your pet every step of the way!