



The Golden Retriever Club of America, Inc.

Improving the Odds for Obtaining a Healthy Golden Retriever Puppy

GRCA Health and Genetics Committee

There are several ways that buyers can improve the odds of purchasing and raising a healthy Golden Retriever and the following documents may provide useful guidance:

- [Acquiring a Golden Retriever](#) is a wonderful guide covering a wide range of topics for prospective new owners.
- [The GRCA Code of Ethics](#) summarizes some accepted practices for Golden Retriever breeders, owners, and GRCA members.
- The [Health section of the GRCA website](#) discusses specific health concerns in depth
- The [GRCA/GRF Health Survey](#) provides detailed charts and analysis of the health and longevity of over 1400 Golden Retrievers

Several of the above references discuss that it is important for both parents of a litter to have their hips, elbows, eyes, and hearts examined; to have typical Golden Retriever temperaments; and to be healthy as described in the Code of Ethics. In addition, prospective owners may wish to ask about the health of close relatives, such as the brothers and sisters of the parents. For example, while it is possible for any Golden with normal hips to produce dysplastic offspring, a Golden Retriever with normal hips from a litter where the majority of its siblings have hip dysplasia may be at particularly high risk to produce dysplastic offspring. Thus, the health status of close relatives is an excellent topic for discussion between the owner and breeder. Hip, elbow, eye, thyroid and heart data on siblings can be researched using the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals website (www.offa.org) by typing in a dog's registered name, clicking on the name, and then clicking on the "vertical pedigree" options. (A more detailed explanation of vertical pedigrees is at <http://www.offa.org/pdf/hovanart.pdf>.) In addition, any health concerns that are particularly important to a prospective owner should certainly be discussed, and might include very early cancers, epilepsy, and skin or allergy problems.

Breeders and owners should also discuss any health guarantees provided by the breeder. Many breeders will agree to take back puppies for health reasons for a refund within a specified time frame. Some breeders provide guarantees against specific health conditions. For health conditions not covered by these provisions, veterinary health insurance, such as the AKC Pet Healthcare Plan (<http://www.akcphp.com/BHIA/>) is available. Breeders should be happy to hear from owners of puppies and dogs that they have bred, provide useful guidance when needed, and use information on the health of the puppies they produce to make future decisions. Thus, continued contact between breeders and puppy owners is generally beneficial long after the puppy moves into its new home.

Thus, a good breeder will provide a genetic background and early environment that maximize the probability of producing physically and mentally healthy puppies. This will include careful evaluation and selection of health and temperament traits of the parents; and providing optimal feeding, socialization, and preventive medical care to the litter. However, it is important for prospective owners to realize that the proper nutrition, veterinary care, preventive health care, socialization, exercise and training provided in the new home are also critical to developing young Golden Retrievers into healthy, well-mannered members of society.

In particular, puppy classes and basic obedience classes are wonderful opportunities for socialization and for owners to learn to communicate with their new canine family member, as well as to take advantage of training in the presence of people and dogs. The age window for maximum learning potential in the dog is limited so this should be a priority for every family with a new Golden Retriever. However, learning also continues throughout life, so most new owners will benefit from attending several good training classes. A puppy class and basic obedience class in the first year of life, followed by a 6 to 8 week training class every couple of years is a goal that many owners find fun and this usually fits into even the busiest schedules. AKC has an online resource for finding AKC clubs offering training throughout the country at http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/training_clubs/

As with human members of our society, excess weight is a serious problem in dogs, and can be particularly damaging in puppies. The health consequences associated with excess weight in puppies and dogs include an increase in the prevalence and severity of joint diseases, increase in a number of other serious diseases, and decreased lifespan (Kealy et al, 2002; Smith et al, 2006). A general rule used by many breeders is that weight gain in a growing puppy should be slow and steady without growth spurts, the ribs should be easily felt but not prominent, and the food should provide what is needed for growth but not enough extra to produce fat. Keeping puppies lean and fit appears to play an important role in reducing hip dysplasia and extending lifespan, and is something every owner can do to protect their Golden Retriever.

In terms of hip dysplasia in Golden Retrievers, the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals lists the overall prevalence of hip dysplasia in x-rays from Golden Retrievers submitted for evaluation to be 20.3% (online link to the data is at http://www.offa.org/stats_hip.html). However, many breeders and owners do not submit x-rays from obviously dysplastic Golden Retrievers or place obviously dysplastic Golden Retrievers prior to age 2, so breed estimates have been based on veterinary teaching hospital populations. These estimates of hip dysplasia incidence in Golden Retrievers vary from about 30.3% to 53 to 73% (Paster et al, 2005). Estimates of hip dysplasia prevalence in Golden Retrievers whose owners participated in the 2006 GRF/GRCA health survey indicate a lower prevalence of 11.3%, a figure that may reflect the influence of GRCA guidelines for breeding. Consistently raising puppies lean would be expected to further reduce the percentage of Golden Retrievers with hip dysplasia, while also extending average lifespan.

Routine grooming, ear cleaning, teeth cleaning, and parasite control are also part of Golden Retriever ownership. While brushing a Golden's coat, providing an occasional bath, trimming nails, periodic tooth brushing, and weekly ear cleaning is generally easy, many owners find that monthly or bimonthly appointments with a groomer are often helpful until they master the art of grooming. In addition, a [useful guide covering some preventive health care information is](#)

[available online](#). Of course, the dog's veterinarian is usually the best resource for information about an individual Golden Retriever's health.

Obtaining a Golden puppy with healthy ancestors and close relatives, possibly purchasing health insurance, training the puppy, providing proper exercise and nutrition, routine grooming, and outstanding veterinary care are all components of improving the odds for a long, healthy and wonderful relationship with a Golden Retriever. Enjoy!

References

Kealy RD, DF Lawler, JM Ballam, SL Mantz, DN Biery, EH Greeley, G Lust, M Segre, and GK Smith, HD Stowe. **Effects of diet restriction on life span and age-related changes in dogs.** J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2002 May 1;220(9):1315-20.

Paster ER, E LaFond E, DN Biery, A Iriye, TP Gregor, FS Shofer, and GK Smith. **Estimates of prevalence of hip dysplasia in Golden Retrievers and Rottweilers and the influence of bias on published prevalence figures.** J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2005 Feb 1;226(3):387-92.

Smith, GK, ER Paster, MY Powers, DF Lawler, DN Biery, FS Shofer, PJ McKelvie, and RD Kealy. **Lifelong diet restriction and radiographic evidence of osteoarthritis of the hip joint in dogs.** J Am Vet Med Assoc . 2006 Sep 1;229(5):690-3