

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

What is that Honking Noise??!

Coolidge, a four-year-old good-natured, all around good guy Wheaten terrier has spent the morning in the back yard doing general dog stuff—rooting around in the leaves, examining the bushes where the deer passed by last night, sniffing the breeze, rolling in the sunspot. Just as you get comfortably arranged on the couch for an afternoon with the ball game, Coolidge steps into the room, extends his head forward and while standing completely still begins to honk loudly and rhythmically. His chest expands as he tries harder to inhale. He's sucking for air so vigorously you're sure he's going to keel over. The episode continues for another 30 seconds, then it's over and Coolidge heads to the kitchen to see if there's anything left on the floor from lunch.

By this time the kids are in the room demanding to know what's wrong with Coolidge, your wife is following him with a paper towel in her hand, just in case and you're scrambling for the phone to call the vet. What on earth was that?

Most likely it's a reverse sneeze or to use the grown-up term, a pharyngeal gag reflex episode. Reverse sneezing is a disconcerting event in which a dog makes unpleasant respiratory noises that sound like he is dying—or will die shortly. It is similar to the noise made by a dog with a collapsing trachea, but reverse sneezing is a far simpler condition that usually doesn't require any treatment. It is called reverse sneezing because it sounds a bit like a dog inhaling sneezes.

While there is no exact cause for reverse sneezing it is suspected to be an irritation of the soft palate and throat, resulting in a spasm. During the spasm the dog's neck will extend and the chest will expand as the dog tries harder to inhale. The problem is that his trachea has narrowed and it's hard for him to get the normal volume of air.

Anything that irritates the throat can cause this spasm and subsequent sneeze. Coolidge might have snuffed up some pollen, a few mites or dust when he was dogging the back yard. Excitement, eating or drinking, exercise intolerance, perfumes, viruses, household chemicals, allergies or plain old post-nasal drip can also cause it. Brachycephalic dogs (flat faced breeds such as Pugs or Boxers) with elongated soft palates occasionally suck the palate into the throat while inhaling, causing the reverse sneeze. Small dogs are more prone to it, possibly because they have smaller throats.

Reverse sneezing rarely requires treatment. When the sneezing stops, the spasm is over. But if you need to DO something, you can massage the dog's throat, cover the dog's nostrils (which makes a dog swallow clearing out the

irritant), or you can try blowing into his nose. If you're a stalwart pet owner and the episode doesn't end quickly, you can try depressing the back of the dog's tongue which will open up the mouth and aid in air moving through the nasal passages.

If reverse sneezing becomes a chronic problem rather than an occasional occurrence, your vet may need to get involved, checking for mites in the airway or investigating allergies. He might need to look up the nasal passages (rhinoscopy), and may even need to take a biopsy to determine the cause of the problem. Sometimes, however, no cause can be identified.

Some dogs have these episodes their entire lives; some dogs develop the condition as the age. Certainly notify your vet if the severity or frequency of the episodes changes or if your dog develops a nasal discharge or a cough.

But for most ordinary dogs like Coolidge, the spasm is a temporary event that goes away on its own, leaving no after-effects save that his family is a little shaken. Because reverse sneezing is not a severe problem, do not worry about leaving your dog home alone. If it occurs when you're not there, the episode will most likely end on its own and your dog will have one more chapter in his secret life.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog. She is a holistic behavior coach, a canine massage therapist (CMT), herbalist, and canine homeopath. Want more information? Have a question? Send a note to Tracie at letstalk@wholedog.biz or visit www.wholedog.biz.