

# The Chihuahua



## Description

The Chihuahua is a tiny toy sized dog. The body is longer than it is tall. The head is well-rounded, apple in shape and the muzzle is short and pointed with a well-defined stop. Puppies have a soft spot on the top of the skull called a "molera," which usually closes by adulthood. The large, round eyes are set well apart and are dark, ruby, and may be lighter in white dogs. The erect ears are large. Dewclaws may be removed. The tail is long, sickle-shaped and either curled over the back or to the side. The coat can be short, long and wavy or flat. All colors, both solid, marked or splashed are accepted. Colors include, but are not limited to, black, white, chestnut, fawn, sand, silver, sable, steel blue, black & tan and parti-color.

## Origin

This is the oldest breed on the American continent and the smallest breed in the world. The Breed is native to Mexico, where it received its name from the Mexican State of Chihuahua. It was only brought to Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. The breeds that were used to make up the Chihuahua are unclear, but some think it originated from the Fennec Fox. The dogs were sacred to Pre-Columbian Indian nations and were also popular pets to the upper class. The dogs are prized for their size and are most valued to some fanciers when they weigh under 2-1/4 pounds (1.3 kg).



## Temperament

The Chihuahua is a good companion dog. Courageous, extremely lively, proud and adventurous, they enjoy affection. Brave, cheerful and agile, Chihuahuas can be strong-willed without proper human leadership. They are loyal and become attached to their owners. Some like to lick their owner's faces. It is important to socialize them well. For some, they may be slightly difficult to train, but they are intelligent, learn quickly, and respond well to proper, firm but



gentle (positive reinforcement) training. They may be difficult to housebreak. Do not let the Chihuahua get away with things you would not allow a large dog to do (Small Dog Syndrome), such as jumping up on humans. While it may be cute for a 5-pound tiny dog to put his paws on your leg when you come home from work, it is allowing a dominant behavior. If you allow this little dog to be your pack leader it will develop many behavior issues such as jealousy, aggression with other dogs and sometimes with humans, and will become undeniably suspicious of people except for its owner. When strangers are present, it will begin to follow its owner's every move, keeping as close as possible. A Chihuahua that is pack leader of its humans may snap at children. This breed is generally not recommended for children, not because it is not good with them, but because most people treat the Chihuahua differently than they would a large dog, causing it to become untrustworthy. Because of its size, this breed tends to be babied and things we humans clearly see as bad behavior for a large dog are looked over as cute with a small dog. Small dogs also tend to be walked less, as humans assume they get enough exercise just running around during the day. However, a walk provides more than just exercise. It provides mental stimulation and satisfies the migration instinct all dogs have. Because of this, small breeds such as the Chihuahua tend to become snappish, yappy, protective and untrustworthy with kids and humans they do not know. Chihuahuas that are their human's pack leader tend to be fairly dog-aggressive. An owner who realizes this and treats the Chihuahua no differently than they would a large breed, becoming a clear pack leader, will get a different, more appealing temperament out of this wonderful little dog, finding it to be a good little child companion.



## Traits

Height: 6 - 9 inches (15 - 23 cm)

Weight: 2 - 6 pounds (1-3 kg)

Life Expectancy: About 15 or more years.

Litter Size: About 1 to 3 puppies

## Health

Chihuahuas are prone to rheumatism, slipped stifle, colds and gum problems as well as corneal dryness and secondary glaucoma, due to their protruding eyes. Chihuahuas can gain weight easily and it may be necessary to watch how much they eat. It is important to take caution around toxic products such as chocolate or fertilizer to ensure that they are not exposed to them. This is a very small breed and it will not take much to poison them. Chihuahuas are often born via cesarean section because puppies are born with relatively large heads. They are susceptible to fractures and other accidents in puppyhood. Some Chihuahuas have a molera, an unclosed section of the skull which can remain open throughout life making the dog prone to brain injury. Chihuahuas have a tendency to wheeze and snore because of their small, short muzzles. They are prone to stress, caused by the owners' tendency to treat them like little babies.

A disease that seems to be increasing among Chihuahuas is GME, which stands for Granulomatous Meningoencephalitis. It is becoming more frequent among the apple head Chihuahuas. It is, at this time, a very poorly understood central nervous system disease that suddenly strikes without much warning. It comes in three types: focal (lesions in the brain or spine); multifocal (lesions in the brain and spine as well as eyes); and optical (causing blindness). There are several methods of treating it currently and there continue to be updates as more research is done. While there are methods of controlling it in those dogs who survive the first two weeks, unfortunately, there is no true cure. It



can go into remission, sometimes for years, but can always resurface. The medications, testing, etc. in the beginning in order to properly diagnose, the testing and medications in the beginning can be quite expensive along with the ongoing maintenance therapy costs. While GME occurs in many other breeds (generally the toy breeds though there are some others) there is a tremendous number of Chihuahuas with it. Interestingly, deer head Chihuahua's do not tend to be prone to GME, only the apple-head type.

### **Living Conditions**

They are good little dogs for apartment life. The Chihuahua likes warm weather and dislikes the cold. They need space just like any other dog. Because they are small does not mean they can be kept in a very small area.

### **Exercise**

Although it is tempting to carry these dainty creatures about, these are active little dogs that need a daily walk. Play can take care of a lot of their exercise needs, however, as with all breeds, play will not fulfill their primal instinct to walk. Dogs that do not get to go on daily walks are more likely to display a wide array of behavior problems, as well as neurotic issues. They will also enjoy a good romp in a safe open area off lead, such as a large, fenced-in yard.

### **Grooming and Care**

The smooth, shorthaired coat should be gently brushed occasionally or simply wiped over with a damp cloth. The long coat should be brushed daily with a soft bristle brush. Bathe both types about once per month, taking care not to get water in the ears. Check the ears regularly and keep the nails trimmed. This breed is an average shedder.

