

Reverse Sneezing in the Lhasa Apso

By Jenny Drastura

It can be frightening to see your Lhasa suddenly begin wheezing and snorting, seemingly unable to breathe. Fortunately, it may not be quite as serious as it looks.

This “snorting” is called reverse sneezing, or inspiratory paroxysmal respiration. With this condition, the dog rapidly pulls air *into* the nose, whereas in a normal sneeze, the air is rapidly pushed *out* through the nose.

Medically speaking, the reverse sneeze consists of short periods (one to two minutes) of severe inspiratory dyspnea characterized by extension of the neck, bulging of the eyes and abduction of the elbows. Inspiratory dyspnea simply means a type of “air hunger.” Swallowing makes the attacks stop because it causes closure of the nasopharynx (above the soft palate).

Reverse sneezing can happen every few days, once a week... once a month. Sometimes irritation of the nasal passages from dust, allergens, cigarette smoke, etc., can be the cause. Our Lhasas are so close to the ground it is easy for them to breathe in dust particles. Tugging on a leash can cause an episode as well.

When you see your dog “snorting,” what you need to do is make the dog swallow by massaging the pharyngeal area (the upper throat area) or by briefly closing the nares. (Nares are the two little openings in the nose.) Relief should come almost immediately. We have found the latter method works best for our dogs, and is the easiest and quickest method. We just place our fingertips over the little nose openings and the snorting stops almost immediately.

It is important you are sure that what the dog is doing is actually reverse sneezing. There are other types of sneezing and coughing that can be more serious. Some of the types of cough to watch out for are congestive heart failure (usually nighttime coughing); tracheal collapse (caused by exercise or excitement); problems with major airways (harsh prolonged cough); or pulmonary lung disease (soft, infrequent coughing). A productive cough (fluid or mucous) suggests infections, kennel cough, etc. Rarely, reverse sneezing can be caused from a malformation in the nasal passage, nasal tumors, mites and inflammation.

More than likely what you are seeing in your Lhasa *is* reverse sneezing – it is quite common in small breeds. But to be safe, watch the dog very carefully and see if closing off the nostrils makes it stop. If you have any doubts, it is better ask your vet.

If you are worried about what will happen if your dog does this while you are not around, don't worry, he will be okay. They look as if they are really struggling, but they can and do recover without us.