

# Is the Bulldog Doomed?

This beloved pet has serious health problems—and it's our fault.

BY KRISTIN LEWIS AND JENNIFER DIGNAN

**T**he bulldog is one of the most popular dogs in the U.S., adored for its cute wrinkly face, **stout** body, and sweet **temperament**. But these lovable pets are suffering. Their flat faces make it hard for them to breathe. Their wrinkles cause skin problems. And the shape of their bodies means a lifetime of joint pain. In fact, American bulldogs are among the least healthy dogs in the world.

Can anything be done to help them?

## Painful Deformities

Thousands of years ago, there were no pugs, poodles, or bulldogs. It took centuries of what is called breeding to get the many kinds of dogs we have today.

How does breeding work?

Dog breeders mate male and female dogs that have particular **traits**—floppy ears or long snouts, for example—with the hope that these dogs will pass those traits onto their puppies. Historically, humans bred dogs mostly for their ability to work—to herd sheep or hunt, for instance. Today, the main

Based on these images, can you tell how the bulldog has changed since 1922?

role of dogs has shifted from helper to pet. Now we breed dogs more for how they look than for what they can do.

For many dogs, this has been bad news.

As Kirsten Theisen of the Humane Society of the United

States explains, “People wanted to own the cutest dog on the block, and breeders began selecting for traits without regard for the health consequences for the animals.”

And that's how the bulldog came to have a face so flat that it has difficulty breathing; a massive, **undershot** jaw that leads to teeth problems; and stubby legs **prone** to painful joint conditions.

## Who Decides?

So who decides what bulldogs should look like? In the U.S., the American Kennel Club (AKC) oversees the official standards of appearance and temperament of bulldogs and 174 other breeds. These are the standards dog-show judges use and breeders aspire to.

It's not just the way bulldogs look that causes them problems, though. Like many **purebred** dogs, they are prone to **hereditary** diseases, including eye and brain diseases and a bleeding disorder.

Responsible breeders try to avoid breeding dogs with hereditary diseases. But not all breeders are responsible. In puppy mills, diseased dogs are bred again and again—and often kept in horrible living



conditions before being sold to pet stores. The only concern in puppy mills is that the dogs are cute enough to sell.

There's no doubt that many owners shower their bulldogs with love and give them the best lives possible. In fact, many owners swear their pets are happy. Still, is a dog whose body makes it risky for him to eat, exercise, or be outside on a hot day really OK?

### Time to Change

In 2009, the British Kennel Club—the AKC's counterpart in the U.K.—changed the breeding standards for English bulldogs in an effort to make them healthier. The dogs will now be required to have longer legs and fewer wrinkles.

Should we do the same for American bulldogs? Not everyone thinks so. What if people still want bulldogs that look the way they do now? Will they turn to puppy mills? More business for puppy mills would mean more sick and suffering dogs. Others ask, why pick on bulldogs? Many breeds have problems. Will we change all those dogs as well?

Consider Uga, the famous mascot for the University of Georgia. After the BKC changed its standards, Swann Seiler, whose family owns Uga, spoke to the *Augusta Chronicle*. "If they start changing the standards, a bulldog will no longer look like a bulldog . . . and we think Uga looks great just the way he is," she said. Too bad Uga can't give us his opinion. ●

# What Do You Think?

**Should we change the breeding standards for bulldogs?** Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

THESE DOGS NEED HELP.

1 Bulldogs are  
suffering.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## NO

BULLDOGS ARE JUST FINE.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide if the breeding standards for bulldogs should be changed. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay on this topic.

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