

Mammal Marvels

WHEN A DOG BREATHES RAPIDLY DURING SLEEP

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PERSONAL COPY

One night, my daughter and I noticed that my grandson, Bru Bru, a Pembroke Corgi, was breathing rapidly in his sleep. My daughter was distraught and tried to gently touch him as if to calm him down.

The next day, she asked Bru Bru's vet for an explanation, and the vet said that some Dogs normally breathe rapidly while they sleep.

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WHY SOME DOGS LOOK DISTRESSED WHILE SLEEPING

Dogs, like people, experience stages of sleeping, and when they're breathing rapidly, it's because they're at the Rapid Eye Movement – or REM – stage of sleep.

You may notice darting eye movements even if their eyelids are closed. This means that your Dog is probably dreaming. At this stage, the dog's limbs, paws, or entire body may twitch or jerk, much like humans do during the REM stage of sleep.

It might be alarming to witness these things in your Dog, but they're not necessarily in severe distress. There are physiologic mechanisms to explain these.



THEIR BRAINSTEM ISN'T BRAINSTEMMING

Dogs may twitch their muscles because the pons, located in the Dog's brainstem, is temporarily not inhibiting muscle movement. They may vocalize, whine, whimper softly, or make muffled barks. All these are signs that suggest they're dreaming.

THEY'RE TOO WARM

One reason Dogs breathe quickly while asleep is to regulate their body temperature. If the room where the Dog sleeps is warm, they will breathe faster to cool down.

THEY'RE A BIT STRESSED

Finally, one's Dog may be feeling anxious or stressed due to a new environment. No worries; stress-induced rapid breathing is mitigated when the Dog feels comfortable and secure.

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WHEN SHOULD YOU GO TO THE VET?

Temporary muscle paralysis during REM sleep is necessary. Dreams occur during the REM phase of sleep, and muscle paralysis prevents Dogs from acting out their dreams that could potentially injure themselves or others.



REM sleep behavior disorder occurs when a Dog exhibits odd or violent limb movements, bites, chews, barks, howls, or growls, whether the Dog is asleep at night or napping in the daytime, according to *Pet MD*. This is different from occasional twitching and whining, as those aren't disruptive behaviors that could endanger your animal companion.

REM sleep behavior disorder typically begins in Dogs at a young age, with over half showing a predisposition by one year of age. Most Dogs will need lifelong management, as they typically don't fully recover. However, if the disorder occurs with another condition like tetanus, treating that condition may allow for recovery from the sleep disorder.

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WHEN IS RAPID BREATHING PROBLEMATIC?

While rapid breathing during sleep can be REM-related and normal, rapid breathing can sometimes indicate serious underlying health issues. Look for other signs like persistent rapid breathing at rest, coughing, labored breathing, sluggishness, loss of interest in activities, increased sleep, or pale gums. These red flags warrant a visit to the vet.

Possible accompanying illnesses may be anemia, heart disease, respiratory infections, or lung problems. These conditions can cause your Dog to require more oxygen, resulting in increased breathing.



3 THINGS THAT CAN HELP YOUR DOG SLEEP WELL

• **KEEP THINGS QUIET**

Make your Dog's sleeping area quiet, with minimal light and a comfortable temperature.

• **DEVELOP A NIGHTTIME RITUAL**

Before bed, have a winding-down ritual to signal to your Dog that it's almost bedtime.

• **KEEP YOUR DOG HEALTHY**

Make sure your Dog's vaccinations and parasite control are updated.



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MONITORING YOUR DOG'S SLEEP

Although your Dog breathing faster during REM sleep is not uncommon, it's understandable for you to worry. If so, you can stay up for one night to monitor your Dog's sleep and breathing.

If the fast breathing persists or if your Dog moves excessively, you should document with a recording. A vet might not be able to figure out your Dog's illness based only on what you say, and a video will be most helpful.

Make a chart listing the times your Dog acted out while asleep, too.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mona Sabalones Gonzalez deeply loves all animals, including humans. She wrote the book "Love for Living Animals", which talks about different species near extinction. Through Animal Scene, she explores the changing relationship between animals and humans within the context of different faiths, spiritual beliefs, and cultures