

TEMPERAMENT OF A CORGI:

Pembroke Welsh Corgi Temperament

What's Good About 'Em, What's Bad About 'Em

Spirited and athletic, yet steady and dependable, the Pembroke Welsh Corgi is a true "big dog on short legs."

Herding, obedience, agility, or chasing balls (with surprising speed) are enjoyable outlets (both physical and mental) for his enthusiasm and desire to work.

If his days include such moderate exercise, along with the loving companionship of his family, the Pembroke Welsh Corgi is adaptable and easy to live with.

He is polite with guests, reserved with strangers, and makes a sensible watchdog.

Most Pembroke Welsh Corgis are fine with other family pets, though territorial with strange dogs and cats -- one of his responsibilities was to chase strays away from his own farm. He is wonderful with livestock, including horses.

This attentive breed learns quickly and responds well to obedience training. Yet he has the independent judgment and problem-solving abilities of a true herding breed, so you must have the confidence to establish and consistently enforce rules, or he may make up his own.

Like most herding breeds, Pembroke Welsh Corgis prefer their flock (family members and other pets) to be gathered together and may try to accomplish this by circling and nipping. Barking can be a problem.

A Pembroke Welsh Corgi may be right for you if you want a dog who....

Is a "big dog" with short legs, i.e. built long and low to the ground, but with a robust body, heavy bone, and a working dog temperament

Is spirited and athletic, but needs only moderate exercise to maintain his muscle tone

Has a short easy-care coat in a variety of colors

Is steady and dependable

Is polite with guests and makes a sensible watchdog

Is usually fine with other family pets, and especially good with livestock

A Pembroke Welsh Corgi may not be right for you if you don't want to deal with...

Providing enough mental stimulation to fulfill his desire to work and give him something productive to do

Destructiveness when bored or left alone too much

Territorial aggression toward dogs and cats he doesn't know

Strong-willed mind of his own, requiring a confident owner who can take charge

Chasing and nipping at things that move: children, joggers, other animals, bikes, cars

Potential for excessive barking (I personally have only experience the excessive barking when there is something out in the backyard that is NOT A WELCOME VISITOR. They let us know right away. As puppies they LOVE attention and will bark and play with other puppies.)

Heavy shedding: I have not experience long hair shedding, it's always course hair shedding. Some corgis will have the longer coat like my females do but my males have the short course hair.

BRIEF HISTORY OF A CORGI:

Pembroke Welsh Corgis have been around since 1107 AD in some way, shape, or form. They certainly didn't look how they look today, but there are historical records describing a short-legged dog used for driving cattle in ye olde Pembrokeshire, Wales. Though the origins are murky, it is suspected that the

Pembroke came about as a result of the Cardigan Welsh Corgi allowed to interbreed with Flemish Spitz-type dogs. Despite the Pembroke's antiquity, the breed was not recognized by the AKC until 1934, and the older Cardigan was not AKC recognized until 1935. Prior to the AKC distinction of the breeds, the two were allowed to interbreed freely. If you are interested in seeing how the Pembroke Welsh Corgi has changed since the early 1900's.

There is something about Corgis that draws people to them. Perhaps it is those wonderful stumpy legs, that bunny butt, or even those huge satellite-dish ears. Most people who fall in love with Corgis fall in love with how they look—and that's okay! But, adopting a dog based solely on looks can have serious consequences for all involved. Corgis often surprise uneducated owners because they do what they were bred to do, and that does not usually coincide with the owners' expectations.

Corgis are herding dogs. They were bred to herd cattle and they take a hands-on approach to doing so. Unlike Border Collies, which herd sheep by eyeing and stalking, Corgis herd by biting and barking until they can get the cattle to move. This behavior is instinctual and, for some Corgis, manifests itself in the home; Corgis will herd you, the cat, other dogs, and especially children. This means that they nip and bite in an attempt to get you to go where they want you to go. When you bring a Corgi home, you must prepare to deal with such behavior. Warn your children and your guests, and have a plan in place to teach your Corgi that such actions are unacceptable inside the house.

The herding instinct also manifests itself in play through barking at things that move, aren't moving, or in general aren't doing what the Corgi wants them to do. If quiet is a concern inside or out, you may want to consider a different breed, or be prepared to stop play when things get out of hand. At the dog park, a Corgi may run around and bark at other dogs playing, seemingly policing their activities. A Corgi will almost certainly bark when playing soccer with the family, or when doing any other activity that may simulate herding. Corgis are watchful

dogs, too, and they will bark when they feel it is necessary to alert the family. Doorbells, keys, and movement outside are all typical barking triggers. In a similar vein, Corgis are very vocal when nothing is happening! They often “talk” to express any number of feelings, a trait considered endearing by many.

Herding requires a certain level of intelligence. The dog must be able to work independently of its handler, determine the best course of action in a constantly changing environment, solve problems, and accomplish goals as a team, among other necessities. Corgis have the intellect to do all those things and then much more. They know what they want and they know how to get it, and are very stubborn as a result. They can't be pushed around—indeed, you must make a Corgi think something was their idea before they will submit to it. They will learn from you even when you think you aren't teaching. They will boss you around if you let them. Worst of all, they make well-thought decisions, and then they act on them. With a dog this smart, you need to be one step ahead at all times.

Obedience training is a must for Corgis, or else they will get the best of you. Intelligent dogs can be challenging for any dog owner, but patience, understanding, and willingness to compromise make things significantly easier on both parties.

In addition to contributing to the mental state of the Corgi, their herding heritage contributes to their physical state. Many people see a Corgi and think of it as a small dog that has little exercise needs, and they classify it as being an “apartment dog” based on its size. This is false in many ways. For one, a Corgi is a medium sized dog with no legs, not a small dog. Secondly, herding is a physically demanding job, and Corgis are able to fill it. They have high energy requirements in a seemingly small package and do no better in a big house than they would in an apartment if they do not meet those requirements. Third, their short legs often deceive people into thinking they are slow, lumbering movers, when any Corgi owner could tell you that they are dogs built like bullets with a speed to match. What good is a herder if they cannot even keep up with their herd?

High energy combined with lots of smarts lends itself to disaster when the dog is not properly cared for. A bored dog, no matter the breed, will find a way to reduce its boredom—typically through destruction of the home. It's imperative that Corgis receive appropriate amounts of exercise to avoid this outcome. A tired Corgi is a dog that is not causing problems, be it destruction, barking, herding of children, or any other undesired behavior. Activities to work the Corgi's brain are also a requirement. After all, a mind is a terrible thing to waste!

Although some people may consider their herding-derived behaviors undesirable, a dedicated owner can minimize their effects by being mentally prepared for the tasks that their Corgis will pit them against. There are, however, numerous physical problems that no amount of training can ever correct, and that you really can never be truly prepared to deal with. However, "not ever being truly prepared" is never an excuse for not being informed!

Unfortunately, the height of the Corgi causes more than just an adorable outline; what makes a Corgi short is also the root of most of its health problems. Their short legs are the result of a genetic mutation causing achondroplastic dwarfism, or chondrodystrophy. The mutation alters the growth and development of cartilage, while also causing an early breakdown of it, throughout the body. As such, Corgis are prone to a number of skeletal issues.

The growth plates that cause bones to grow are normally thick, producing bone systematically until sex hormones trigger growth to stop. In the Corgi and other dwarfed dogs, the growth plates are very thin, reproducing incorrectly and sporadically and then maturing much sooner than normal, therefore producing a gnarled, shortened bone. The fragile growth plates lend themselves to easy injury. An injured growth plate is at risk for causing one bone to stop growth while the rest continue, producing a twisted or bowed limb that can be painful and is certainly not sound. How does a dog injure a growth plate? Overexertion. High-impact activities such as running or jumping can crush the plate. It's very important to limit such activities until the Corgi is fully grown at around 1-1.5

years. Don't stop your puppy from running and playing, but do stop your puppy from jumping off of furniture, don't take your puppy jogging, and avoid strenuous agility work.

The joints in a dwarfed dog are very different from the joints in a standard dog—like the rest of the dog's skeletal system, they are deformed. In fact, if the same joints were on an average dog, they would certainly be considered dysplastic. In a Corgi, these types of seemingly dysplastic joints are normal and allow easy, pain-free movement. But, as in standard dogs, dwarves do have varying degrees of joint quality and are capable of coming down with hip or elbow dysplasia. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, or the OFA, evaluates the joint health of any breed of dog. All dogs should be OFA tested and pass with “excellent”, “good”, or “fair” evaluations before being bred to reduce the occurrence of crippling joint disorders in the offspring and, ultimately, the population at large. If you have questions about the OFA status of your dog's sire or dam, you can search offa.org with the AKC registration name or number in question. If the tests were done through OFA, the results will show on the website.

The rapid cartilage degeneration in a Corgi is the most painful and most dangerous ailment afflicting the breed. Cartilage is a connective tissue that cushions joints as well as holds them together. Because cartilage wears down faster in dwarfed dogs, osteoarthritis may develop at an early age—particularly in areas with small bones, such as the wrist or feet. Spinal arthritis is almost guaranteed at some point in the Corgi's life, occurring much earlier than it typically would in a standard dog. Finally, the Corgi is at high risk for a condition called intervertebral disc disease, or IVDD. In dwarf dogs, the normally squishy disc between the vertebrae in the spine hardens prematurely and severely reduces spine flexibility. When the discs are forced to compress or stretch, the disc can rupture and what squishy insides that are left can put pressure on the spinal cord and surrounding nerves. IVDD has various degrees, from mild back pain to complete paralysis. It's very painful and, worst of all, can strike early. All

Corgis have imperfect spines, but to what degree? The amount of degeneration in the spine depends on several factors, including history of jumping, amount of intense exercise, rough handling, and obesity.

Obesity for Corgis is more than just a cosmetic problem. It can be a death sentence. The extra weight pulls on the spine and aggravates the joints, precipitating problems that otherwise may not have occurred. Corgis are nothing if not motivated by food, but it is essential that weight is carefully monitored. It's very easy for a Corgi to gain weight. A good exercise regime and appropriate portions of food are quite necessary for a Corgi's health. If you notice your Corgi getting fat, step up the walks and cut back the food. A Corgi with lightly padded ribs and a tucked loin is a Corgi that is going to live a longer, happier life.

At the twilight of a Corgi's life, obese or not, there is one last problem owners need to worry about: degenerative myelopathy, or DM. DM is an autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks the nervous system, causing progressive hind-end loss. The age of onset is typically 8 and above and, when noticed, typically means a dog has 6 to 12 months to live as the paralysis works its way up the spine. It's also completely painless. There is a DNA test which identifies at risk dogs; currently, 60% of Pembrokes test "at risk" for the disease. Most "at risk" dogs do not come down with DM, which indicates something else is afoot in the onset of the disease. Until researchers identify what that "something else" is, DM is best avoided by caring for your Corgi the best way you can and hoping it doesn't strike. All things considered, DM isn't the most terrible way for a Corgi to end its life provided both you and the dog have the proper support you need.

Two other diseases that are routinely tested for in breeding stock are progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) and Von Willebrand's disease (vWD). PRA is just what it sounds like, a progressive loss of function in the retina that leads to eventual blindness. Corgis begin showing signs around the middle of their life span. The Canine Eye Registration Foundation, CERF (NOW CALLED OFA), will evaluate

the condition of the Corgi's retinas. Von Willebrand's disease is a bleeding disorder common to many breeds and can be avoided by a simple genetic test. Thankfully, due to testing and appropriate breeding, the occurrence of these diseases is rather small in the Corgi population.

If you notice your Corgi acting stiff, losing hind limb function, limping, or otherwise in pain without an immediate source, take your dog to the vet. It could be a sign of musculoskeletal stress, and with these sorts of injuries, quicker attention to the problem means better results on the path to recovery.

The Corgi has a wonderfully made double coat that keeps them warm in the winter and cool in the summer. The quality of the hair is just right so that after a day of moving cattle in muddy fields, no bath is required—the dirt will fall right out as the coat dries. The coat is truly a marvel to behold, but it comes at a price: shed hair, everywhere. No surface, food, or drink is immune to the scourge of the Corgi coat. No amount of brushing, blow drying, bathing, Furminating, or any other sort of grooming will stop the encroachment of shed hair into your life. The amount they shed is phenomenal.

Imagine, if you will, the greatest amount of hair you can feasibly foresee coming off an animal. Now, imagine two or three times that amount. That is a rough estimate of how much Corgis shed, and probably an underestimate at that. If you are not okay with a dog shedding its weight in hair every month, a Corgi certainly is not for you. This warning may seem like a gross exaggeration of what should be a minor part of everyday dog ownership, but it is something many cannot comprehend until they experience it first-hand—and by then, it is too late.

Besides almost constant brushing to keep the shedding low, the coat needs little maintenance—bathing more than once every couple of months is unnecessary unless the Corgi in question has become unspeakably disgusting. In addition, the coat should never be shaved, as it compromises long-term quality of the coat. The Corgi's short stature also lends itself to more coat maintenance on rainy days;

when a tall dog would normally get just his feet wet, a Corgi's whole underside will be soaked. In terms of other grooming, Corgis need care just like every other dog—nails trimmed and teeth cleaned.

Like all dogs, Corgis need to be socialized very well or they can develop serious aggressive issues. They require basic obedience using consistent, positive methods or they may become very unruly. They need a lot of exercise and mental workouts to keep them out of trouble, quiet, and in tip-top shape. Without proper care, Corgis can become very difficult to manage. You must be dedicated to these dogs in order to make it work out, but they will become dedicated to you in return.

When you get a Corgi, you are gaining a member of the family. They are not dogs that you can “set and forget”—they thrive on human interaction. They don't need to be constantly entertained; simply being with the family is enough. They are incredibly loving, wonderful animals, and no amount of hair will make any loving Corgi owner regret their decision. If you are seeking a somewhat challenging, intelligent, sensitive, bold, vocal, and very social animal, a Corgi is it.

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