Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome (BOAS) in Dogs: Client Handout

What is Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome (BOAS)?

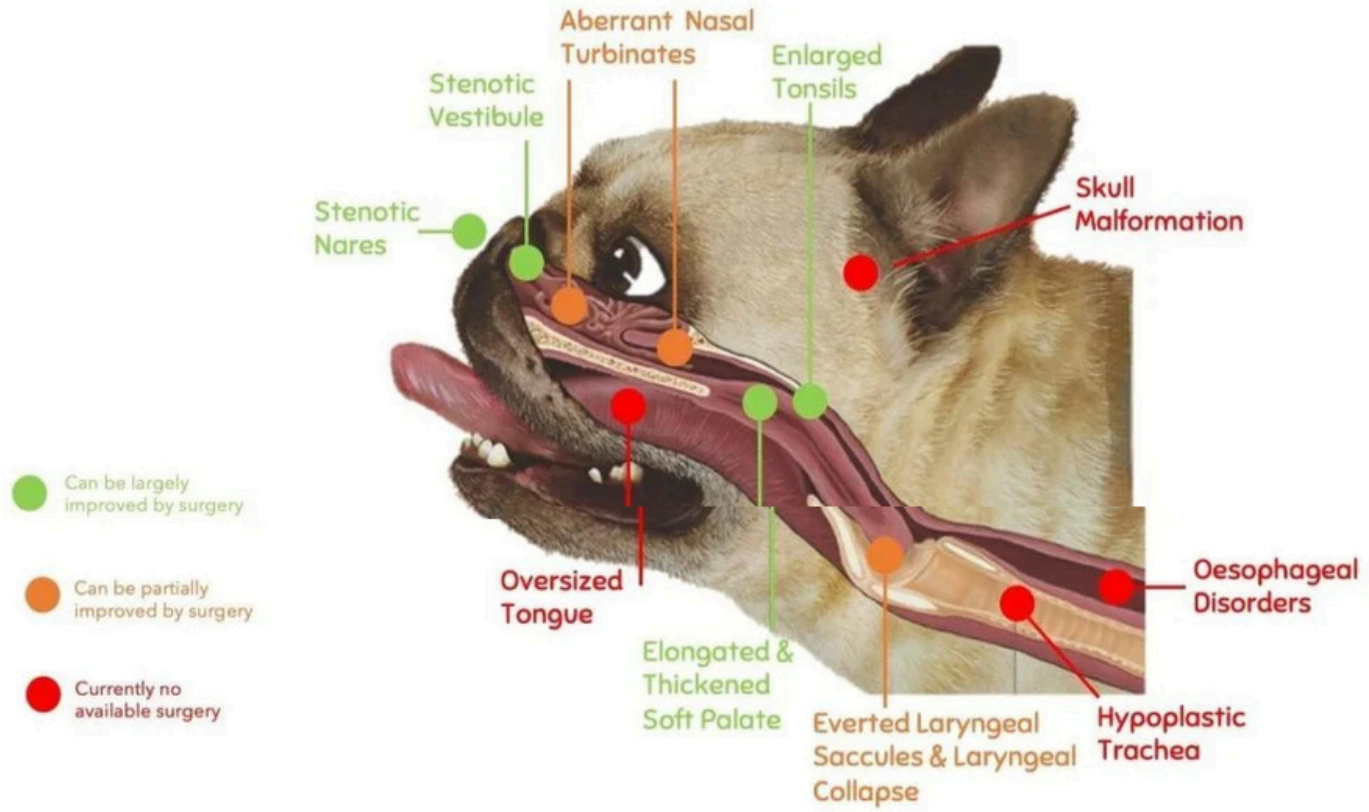
Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome (BOAS) refers to a group of upper airway problems commonly seen in dogs with short, "squished" faces—such as Bulldogs, Pugs, French Bulldogs, Shih Tzus, and other brachycephalic breeds. The condition is caused by the abnormal shape of their skulls, which can lead to airway obstruction and difficulty breathing. This condition can affect the nose, throat, and larynx (voice box) and can range from mild to severe.

How Does BOAS Affect Dogs?

In dogs with BOAS, the breathing passages are often constricted due to anatomical abnormalities, such as:

1. **Stenotic Nares:** Narrow or blocked nostrils.
2. **Elongated Soft Palate:** A longer-than-normal soft palate that can block the airway.
3. **Everted Laryngeal Saccules:** Small pouches in the larynx (voice box) may be pushed out of place, blocking airflow.
4. **Hypoplastic Trachea:** An abnormally small trachea (windpipe).

These airway issues can lead to impaired airflow and difficulty in getting enough oxygen, which may worsen with exercise, heat, or stress.



Signs to Look Out For:

It's important to watch for the following signs of BOAS in your dog, as they may indicate the presence of this condition:

- Loud, Noisy Breathing: You may hear your dog snoring, snorting, or wheezing, especially when they are at rest or relaxed.
- Exercise Intolerance: Dogs with BOAS may tire quickly or struggle to keep up with walks or play.
- Panting or Difficulty Breathing: Excessive panting, especially during moderate activity or in warm weather, can indicate breathing difficulty.
- Gagging or Retching: Some dogs with BOAS may make gagging or coughing sounds.
- Blue Gums or Tongue: In more severe cases, poor oxygen flow can lead to a bluish tint to the gums or tongue, indicating a lack of oxygen in the bloodstream.
- Trouble Sleeping: Dogs may have difficulty lying down to sleep or may wake up frequently due to breathing issues.

If you notice any of these signs, it's important to consult your veterinarian to assess your dog’s condition.

Managing BOAS:

While there is no cure for BOAS, several management strategies can help improve your dog’s quality of life:

1. Weight Management: Overweight dogs with BOAS experience more difficulty breathing. Maintaining an ideal body weight is crucial.
2. Environmental Management:

    - Avoid strenuous exercise, especially in hot weather.
    - Keep your dog cool in warm climates and avoid overexertion.
    - Reduce stress and provide a calm environment.
3. Medication: In some cases, your veterinarian may prescribe medications to help with inflammation or other symptoms related to BOAS.

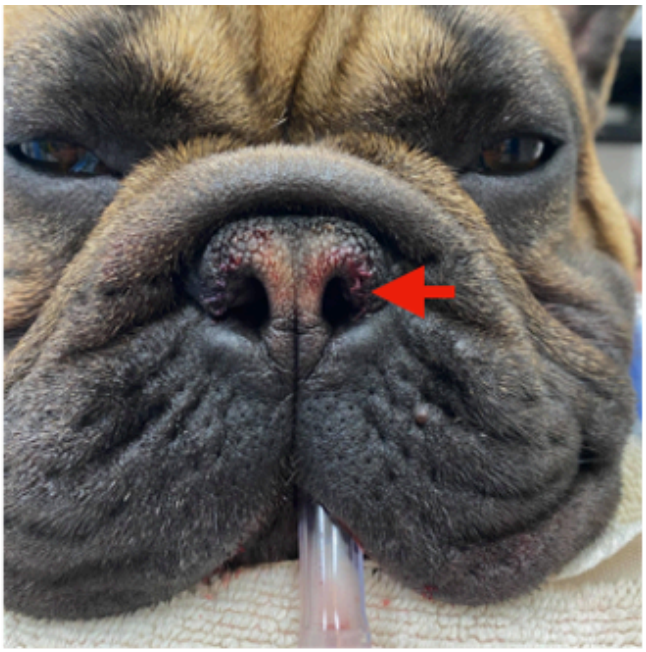
Surgical Treatment: BOAS Surgery

For dogs with moderate to severe BOAS, surgery may be recommended to help improve their breathing and quality of life. The most common surgeries performed for BOAS include:

- Stenotic Nares Surgery (Nostril Widening): This procedure involves widening the nostrils to allow more airflow through the nose.
- Soft Palate Resection: The vet may trim or remove part of the elongated soft palate to prevent it from blocking the airway.
- Laryngeal Sacculectomy: This involves removing the everted laryngeal saccules that can obstruct airflow.

These procedures aim to improve airflow, decrease the likelihood of respiratory distress, and prevent the worsening of BOAS symptoms.

BEFORE SURGERY



AFTER SURGERY

What Does Recovery Look Like After Surgery?

Post-surgical recovery will vary depending on the dog and the procedure performed. However, general recovery guidelines include:

1. Rest: After surgery, your dog will need rest for at least 7-10 days. Avoid excessive activity or exercise during this time.
2. Follow-Up Care: Your veterinarian will schedule follow-up appointments to ensure proper healing and check for any complications.

3. Monitoring Breathing: It's important to keep a close eye on your dog's breathing and watch for any signs of distress.
4. Pain Management: Your vet will provide pain management to keep your dog comfortable during recovery.
5. Diet and Feeding: Your dog may need a soft food diet for a few days after surgery, especially if the mouth or throat was involved.

Most dogs recover well after surgery, and the procedure can significantly improve their breathing, exercise tolerance, and overall quality of life. However, in some cases, further treatments or surgeries may be needed, especially if symptoms persist.

What to Expect Long-Term

While surgery can improve symptoms, BOAS is a lifelong condition that requires ongoing management. Even after surgical intervention, your dog may need weight management and lifestyle adjustments to ensure they stay comfortable.

If you have any concerns about your dog's breathing or are wondering if surgery might be right for them, don’t hesitate to contact your veterinarian for a thorough examination and discussion of treatment options.

Conclusion: Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome is a common issue in certain breeds of dogs, but with proper care, monitoring, and sometimes surgery, many dogs with BOAS can live happy and healthy lives. Early recognition and intervention are key to helping your dog breathe easier and enjoy a better quality of life.

If you suspect your dog may have BOAS or if you have questions about managing the condition, please contact our veterinary team. We're here to help!