CAYMAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Brachycephalic Respiratory Syndrome

The brachycephalic dogs are the ones with the "pushed in" faces. Boston terriers, Bulldogs, Pekingese, shih tzus, pugs, and boxers make up a large percentage of this group. As a result of congenital malformations, obstructive upper respiratory problems are common in these dogs.
The brachycephalic syndrome consists of stenotic nares, elongated soft palate, and tracheal hypoplasia.

Stenotic nares refers to the condition where an animal is born with abnormally small openings in the nostrils. Under normal conditions, dogs breathe through the nose. The reduced size of the nostril openings causes brachycephalic dogs to exert more effort during breathing. During exercise, these dogs often cannot inhale enough air and resort to open-mouth breathing.

The soft palate is a flap that separates the oral cavity from the nasal passage. Normally, the free edge of this structure slightly overlaps the epiglottis. (see design). When the soft palate is elongated, it hangs loosely into the throat, creating snorting sounds.

Tracheal hypoplasia is a condition diagnosed commonly in English Bulldogs. It occurs less frequently in other brachycephalic dogs. Dogs with tracheal hypoplasia have dangerously narrowed tracheas. Dogs suffering from brachycephalic syndrome are intolerant of exercise. The slightest amount of exertion causes panting, open-mouth breathing, shortness of breath and respiratory distress. The hot weather exacerbates the condition.

Clinical symptoms observed in dogs with brachycephalic syndrome include: decreased exercise tolerance, noisy breathing, and difficulty breathing. Dogs with an elongated soft palate often make a characteristic gurgling sound.

Surgery is often required to correct problems associated with brachycephalic syndrome. If surgery is an option, it should be done at a very early age (usually under one year of age).