

Your Potbellied Pig's Health

As with other animals, potbellied pigs can't tell us when they're sick, so it's up to us to notice the signs of health or illness. As you get to know your pig, you'll learn to recognize when your pig is feeling good and when she's feeling under the weather. Here are some general things that may indicate signs of sickness:

- Loss of appetite (most pigs love to eat, so this is often a sign that something's wrong)
- Hair standing on end all over the pig's body, patchy hair loss, excessive itching
- Change in mood (such as increased grumpiness) or lethargy
- Pig standing with his back hunched
- Absence of or difficulty urinating/defecating; very dark, concentrated urine
- Limping or difficulty walking
- Discolored vaginal discharge
- Hemorrhage from eyes, ears, nose, rectum, vulva
- Coughing or nasal discharge
- High temperature (103 and up)
- Elevated respiration



Pigs can have a variety of health issues, so do your homework and research every aspect of how to care for them. Health issues can be as simple as an ear infection or as complicated as cancer. The most common health problems in potbellied pigs are respiratory troubles and constipation. Wounds from fights with other pigs, dog attacks or general injuries need to be assessed and tended to.

Arthritis is common in older pigs. It can result from a variety of causes, such as a pig being overweight at one point or lack of adequate exercise. Unless a pig is in poor physical condition, mild exercise will be beneficial. Try little walks several times a day. Massage followed by range-of-motion exercises can help, too. You might also want to try holistic care and supplements to ease the pain from arthritis. If your pig seems to be in a lot of pain, talk to your veterinarian.

Speaking of vet care, you'll want to find a veterinarian experienced with potbellied pigs. It's a good idea to research vets in your area and select one before you adopt a pig. For a state listing of potbellied pig veterinarians, go to the Shepherd's Green website at

www.9sites.com. If you don't find a vet on the list near you, Best Friends' pig manager, Yvonne McIntosh, might be able to help. E-mail her at yvonnem@bestfriends.org.

Your potbellied pig will need an annual checkup. There are routine vaccinations for potbellied pigs; your vet will know which ones your pig needs. Pigs are susceptible to worms and parasites, just like other domesticated critters. Several deworming products are available, so consult your vet to discuss the options.

Before you actually have to take your pig to the vet, get your pig familiar with being in a dog crate and in a vehicle. You can put some treats in the back of the kennel every now and then, leaving the door open, so the pig can come and go. This familiarity will reduce the amount of stress for both you and the pig when it is time for a scheduled or emergency trip to the vet. Be sure to place a rubber-backed mat or rug on the bottom of the crate so that your pig will have good footing. It is also a good idea to put a blanket inside the crate to help the pig feel secure.

Yvonne McIntosh is the potbellied pig specialist, adoption coordinator and manager for Best Friends Animal Society. If you have questions related to anything piggy, please send an e-mail to yvonnem@bestfriends.org.