**Characteristics of Great Danes**

**History**

Country of origin Deutschland or Germany

Also known as Deutsche Dogge or German Mastiff and The Great Dane appeared in Europe in the 5th century and most likely came to fruition from breeding a mastiff to an Irish Grey Hound, and eventually, to Irish Wolfhounds to create better boar hunters and guardians. Today’s Great Dane originated in Germany, and is also known as, Deutsche Dogge, or German Mastiff. The Great Dane is a member of the working class breeds.

**Disposition**

* Highly social – Requires human companionship, best if not left alone for long hours. If pup is socialized with humans and other animals from a young age they are generally friendly. However, if not socialized properly, they could grow to become aggressive and prey driven.
* Curious- When young (or at least until 2) it is best to crate train to avoid destructive/unwanted behaviors. Unsupervised large breeds have the ability to chew any object when teething or feeling separation anxiety. It is best to keep them in a safe place to avoid injury and property damage until they can be trusted.
* Friendly- Known as the Gentle Giant, most have a great disposition with humans and animals. However, depending on the genetics and environment, some may become fearful of other dogs and strangers without the proper socialization and training. While these are common issues with all breeds they may appear exaggerated in Great Danes due to their larger size.
* Comfort seeking- They often like to sit on a couch, chair or soft surface. A comical classic Dane pose is just their rump on a lap or couch cushion with front feet on the ground in front of them. Most have a habit of leaning on humans, no matter the size. A lean against an unstable elderly person or child could cause accidents if unsupervised.
* Playful-Boisterous when young (1-3 years) and has an average activity level into adulthood (3-6). When playing, they do not realize their size and can easily knock down an adult. Activity with small children needs supervision. The height of their tail is about equal to a toddler’s face and a whipping tail to the face can be very painful and cause the child some discomfort. The mouth of a year-old Dane is at a child’s face level, increasing the risk of injury over food or toys when playing.
* Willful-Due to personality and size, it is extremely important that this breed attend a suitable obedience class. Depending on its temperament, a Great Dane may test boundaries, rules and limitations. Therefore, owners should be consistent with daily exercise, discipline, and training, and preferably be an experienced large breed dog owner.

**Physical Characteristics**

* The Great Dane pup doesn’t stay small long; in fact, for several months, they can gain up to a pound a day. They grow to a full adult height within one year, while still having the intelligence and impulse control of a puppy.
* The Great Dane has an intimidating appearance due to its large stature. Male Great Danes will generally stand on average between 32”-39” tall at the shoulders and weigh between 120-200 lbs. Females will stand on average 28”-32”and weigh between 100-150 lbs.
* Some have larger, or loose, jowls that can produce slobber and drool.
* They typically have large floppy ears and a boxed head shape.
* They have short hair and average shedding with no undercoat.

**Health Issues**

* Short lifespan like all large breed dogs. Typically live from 8 to 12 years.
* Heart Disease (cardiomyopathy, mitral valve defects, and persistent right aortic arch, etc.)
* Cancer (Osteosarcoma, Mast Cell tumors)
* Orthopedic issues, such as Hip Displaysia, Luxating Patella, and Cruciate tears
* Tail injuries, also known as “Happy Tail”
* Gastric Torsion & Bloat (GDV) – Built up gas in the stomach begins to suffocate the animal from the stomach pushing on the lungs. This can be from the animal taking in too much air while eating, or panting from anxiety during a thunderstorm. The Torsion occurs when the stomach flips and cuts off blood supply, killing the lower organs. Too much liquid in the stomach prior to exercise can cause this but it can also occur on its own from tension. This is a life threatening issue. Gastropexy is a prophylactic surgery to reduce the chances of gastric torsion. It involves tacking the stomach to the cavity wall. GDV may be genetically predisposed. The Great Dane is the #1 breed at risk to experience GDV and GDV is the #1 killer of Great Danes.
* Entropion/Extropian (eyelid malfunctions)
* Wobbler Syndrome (compression of spinal cord)
* Hypertrophic Osteodystrophy (**HOD**) (skeletal disorder of rapidly growing giant breeds)
* Hypothyroidism (thyroid’s inability to produce sufficient hormones to maintain metabolism)
* Addison’s Disease (hypoadrenocorticism- a defiency of hormones produced by Adrenal Gland)

**Care**

* Great Danes must eat a high-quality, balanced diet. They have a slow metabolism and adults do not eat as much as expected in proportion to their size. The Great Dane adult must eat two equal size meals (generally morning and evening). However, puppies may eat three times a day until they are able to consume the calories required in two meals. Puppies will consume a considerable amount of food as they mature tapering off to an adult portion at approximately one year. Growing puppies must be fed specific calcium / phosphorous ratios and specific fat and protein percentages to prevent rapid growth causing orthopedic issues. Since Great Dane puppies already grow at an accelerated rate, to hasten their growth prematurely would jeopardize their bone structure and shorten their life even more.
* Short hair and average shedding needs occasional brushing.
* Great Danes are indoor dogs. They do not possess multiple layers of fur to protect them from the outdoor elements.
* Bathing (bi-monthly). Nails are huge and thick (trim weekly to keep short). Ears are large and are a moist dark place for yeast to grow (clean weekly).
* Requires daily exercise to keep them healthy and actively engaged. The Dane needs enough room to run and play.

Due to breed’s XL size, their collars, toys, beds, food, medications, and medical needs are more expensive than they are for other breeds.

For more information regarding the medical conditions mentioned in this article consult:

Veterinary Partner – <http://www.veterinarypartner.com>

The American College of Veterinary Surgeons (animal owners section) [www.acvs.com](http://www.acvs.com)

Great Dane Links <http://www.ginnie.com/gdlinks.htm>

Michigan State University Veterinary Hospital <https://cvm.msu.edu/hospital>