

TIBETAN MASTIFF GROWTH IT TAKES A LOT OF PATIENCE

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While the controversy of overall size continues to perplex many newcomers to the breed one element that seems to be particularly confusing is the typical Tibetan Mastiff growth pattern. Over the years I have heard from new puppy owners who are disappointed and discouraged from the onset that their Tibetan Mastiff is not growing as he/she "should". They expect a big dog and they want the dog to grow "faster." Veterinarians not familiar with the breed further exacerbate the problem because they do not understand that the breed does not fall within an acceptable and "normal" range of canine growth. History dictates that we can expect a large dog but it takes a lot of patience and experience to appreciate that the Tibetan Mastiff is a **SLOW MATURING** breed.

The Newborn

Let's start at the beginning. On average a healthy newborn TM puppy may weigh anywhere between 13-22 ounces at birth. Birth weight is dependant on a variety of factors but the total number of puppies in a litter is one of the most important. Breeders may put their puppies on the scale daily or weekly to ensure puppies are growing and often find that individual newborns vary in their weight gain. Rate of growth in the initial weeks may be anywhere between 2-8 ounces a day while older puppies may put on 1-3 pounds a week.

Again, this is dependent on a variety of factors such as number of puppies in a litter, the quality and quantity of the dam's milk supply, daily intake for each individual puppy, and whether or not the litter is being supplemented. *It is important to note that more than one breeder is witness to the fact that the largest/bulkiest puppy in the litter at this point does not necessarily turn out to be the largest when the entire litter matures.*



Your Tibetan Mastiff Puppy



Tibetan Mastiff puppies are often allowed to travel to their new homes somewhere between the 8-12 week mark and this signals the time when it becomes the responsibility of the new owner and a veterinarian to chart puppy's progress. It is extremely important for new owners to schedule an initial puppy well check-up visit upon puppy's arrival. Introducing your puppy and establishing his/her personal growth chart will help both you and your vet to better understand the specific growth pattern of your dog.

Most owners and veterinarians expect medium to large large breeds to reach their final weight and height by 12-18 months but that is not the case with the Tibetan Mastiff. Special attention must be paid to the particular breed line from which your dog descends, as it is not uncommon for some lines to be slower to mature than others. It is always best to

discuss this with your breeder first so that you are prepared and have an idea of what to expect from your dog based on his/her pedigree. Impatience with the maturation process or inexperience on the part of many veterinarians who want to fit this primitive breed on average growing curves can bring about a lot of frustration.

It is generally agreed upon that the average female reaches maturity at *3-4 years of age* while males generally take *1-2 years longer*. Your dog's attitude to food, overall health and rapid or slow growth rate will help determine how your dog develops over the years. "Chow hounds" tend to pack on weight fairly quickly while "grazers" may remain lanky. Weight gain may be anywhere from 5 to 10 pounds some months of the first year. Sometimes it is common for larger dogs to "fall apart" or be out of proportion as their body parts grow at distinctive rates. Heads may seem overly large or rears may grow slightly while fronts haven't caught up giving the illusion that your dog is riding down an escalator. The in-between years may bring about leggy, rangy, or lean dogs that are putting all their growing efforts into long bone development or height first.

After The First Year



The typical rate of monthly growth may slow considerably after the first year and may be almost imperceptible. You may notice that your TM goes through growth spurts instead as he/she follows the dictates of the four seasons. Spring signals the onset of warmer weather and the usual time for your Tibetan Mastiff to blow his/her coat. Food intake is generally less at this time and the hot temperatures of summer continues that trend. The autumn months indicate colder weather is on the way and dogs don't normally have a problem eating their fill well into winter. The very gradual increase in weight in males may seem more noticeable as they are impressively dramatic

with their heavy coats and manes but females and males go through a period where they build overall bulk and their chests "drop" and fill out.

Dogs in Breeding Programs

Breeders may also notice influences that affect their own breeding stock. A more mature female physique may be quite noticeable to breeders once a 3 or 4-year old bitch has delivered her litter and there may be either a weight loss/gain for intact stud dogs who anticipate the breeding season.

Growth and the Show Ring

It is also important to note that the slower maturation process should affect how you approach the show ring so be mindful of exhibiting your dog in the appropriate classes. Entering your young Tibetan Mastiff in the 12-18 month class may bring you much better results than pushing him/her into the Open category. Judges must be made aware that juvenile dogs may not have the size and bulk required to compete against an older or a fully mature dog like the one described in the breeding standard.

Personal Experience

Below is a PDF depicting a typical Tibetan Mastiff growth chart that I kept for my first dog. My breeder made me aware of his potential height and weight (27 inches and 130 pounds respectively) and I presented that information when I visited with my veterinarian. It was not long before I found this vet to be especially wearisome, as she simply would not consider the input. She charted my dog's progress on a Waltham Healthy Growth Chart that ended at the 30-month mark and repeatedly insisted that my dog's breeder had given me false expectations. Based on the growth curve that my dog was apparently following in the first year she stated that he would never grow to be more than 100 pounds. I switched vets and continued to monitor my dog's growth. As you can see, his development was mapped out as a slow but steady progression to his final weight of just over 130 pounds. *All in all it took him 5 years.*



Growth Chart

