

## Breeding Your Great Dane



Great Danes are a breed that take a lot of hard work and financial commitment to breed. They have many congenital (inheritable) conditions that can be passed along to offspring, so it's really important to do some good research first. I want to make sure you have all the information you need before you get started. I am sure that your Dane has been kept up to date on her vaccinations, annual physical exams, and heartworm prevention, but additional tests are recommended to help reduce the chances that the puppies you bring into this world will have serious health defects. It may take an investment of \$1000 or more to do these, but it's well worth the investment.

First, I presume your female/male is at least 2 years old and has been OFA\* certified. This most often requires anesthesia, because the vet's office must take x-rays of his/her hips and elbows when he/she is perfectly still. The x-rays must then be sent to Missouri, to be read by the radiologists there. The purpose of this test is to reduce the chances your dog will pass along hip dysplasia and elbow problems, which are fairly common in the breed. I would only breed a dog who is considered Excellent, because dogs with Good or Fair hips are likely to create dogs with debilitating arthritis--and you know Danes only live so long, so they shouldn't be painful their entire lives.

Second, I recommend doing some bloodwork on your dog. Danes are noted for hypothyroidism and Addison's disease, two metabolic deficiencies that result in poor health and sometimes even death. A thyroid screen should be sent to the lab at the veterinary school at Michigan State University, because they can test more completely,



for signs of thyroid disease that haven't shown up yet. To test for Addison's is more complicated, but a good general chemistry profile would rule out any current abnormalities.

Third, there is a high incidence of heart disease in the breed, as well as bloat. Bloat is actually one of the most common causes of death in Danes. Heart disease is another. You should call your veterinarian and discuss screening, which may include chest x-rays (can be done when you do hip x-rays), and also an EKG to make sure there are no electrical disturbances in his/her heart that could cause problems for his/her offspring. Many good breeders feel that a dog who has bloated should never be bred.

Fourth, make sure to consult with a local veterinary ophthalmologist regarding CERF\* qualifications for your dog. There are some eye disorders common in Danes that should be ruled out before you breed this dog. Your veterinarian should be able to recommend a local specialist to you. There are actually some specific DNA tests available these days, although I don't know which ones are available for Great Danes. Your veterinarian should be able to help you determine which are appropriate.



Now that we've discussed medical issues, you need to check your dog's pedigree to make sure none of the parents or grandparents or great grand parents had these problems. This will probably mean contacting his/her original breeder, and doing a pedigree search which you can do with help of the AKC (check out their web site at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)--also has good info on health & finding a dog). When you contact his/her breeder, be sure to find out for certain if he/she is allowed to be bred based upon the contract you signed when you bought him/her--most breeders restrict breeding for pet-quality dogs because they feel the animal would not make it in the show ring. So if you bought him/her from

a breeder, there may be a clause that prohibits you from breeding him/her--certainly you'd want to know that before you breed him/her.\*\*\* The breeder may also be able to steer you towards a line you might want to cross your dog with, but keep in mind that you don't want to breed him/her to any of his/her brothers/sisters/cousins/etc.--that we call line breeding, and can cause some lethal defects in puppies. You will need to do the pedigree search on the dog you plan to use as a mate. Make sure to research the pedigree of the other dog closely for conformation and health problems so you will have a good investment. You will also want to make sure to have both animals tested for brucellosis, a sexually transmitted disease of dogs that can cause miscarriage and infertility, and occasionally can infect humans. This test needs to be done prior to breeding.

It goes without saying the dog you plan to breed should be AKC registered. Without being registered, you have no way to determine the health history, color, or other important information on your dog's ancestors.

Additionally, only Danes with sound, stable temperaments should be bred. Any Dane that is excessively shy and/or exhibits aggression towards other dogs or people should never be bred as this type of temperament can be hereditary.



If you decide to breed you must make the commitment to the lives of every puppy you are responsible for bringing into the world for life. That means, if someone who buys a dog from you can't keep it, you need to have a plan to take the pup back until such time as you can find it a new home. Many breeders do not make this commitment, and as a result, hundreds of Danes are euthanized in shelters across the nation because there are not

enough rescues to take them all. If you bring pups into the world, you will want to make sure you know they are getting a home at least as good if not better than yours. And Danes can sometimes have up to 14 puppies. That's a lot of homes to find! You will want to start a list of folks who are willing to buy a dog from you, and make sure you have them sign a contract to spay or neuter the pet puppies, so they won't add to the Dane overpopulation problem already out there.

Another thing you should understand is that some times Danes need C-sections to deliver puppies--not all the time, mind you, but some times. This can be a critical procedure and you need to discuss with your veterinarian before you breed his/her protocol for this. All dogs undergoing C-sections should be given gas (isoflurane) anesthesia, IV fluids, and so on, and despite this, some dogs do not make it thru surgery. If you are not prepared to lose a dog and all her puppies under anesthesia for a c-section, then breeding is not a good idea. As for the female, Danes tend to cycle about once every 7-12 months, and should be on the second heat cycle and at full adult weight at least prior to the first breeding, and should be allowed to have a heat cycle between each litter of puppies so she can regain her reserves. Because Danes are so short lived, that means you shouldn't plan to have more than 2 litters, maximum, before having her spayed, and your male neutered. You will need to be prepared to keep 2 100+ pound dogs apart for the 3 weeks of test 1 her heat cycles when she shouldn't be bred. Even a half-hour together in the back yard could result in an unplanned litter that might be harmful to her health.

Finally, you may want to consider that if you do breed your male that he may change in his attitude to you and your family. Some male dogs become aggressive to families, others become aggressive to other dogs, and so on. You should be prepared for this change. If you enjoy the bond you have with your dog now,

understand that it may never be the same if you add an intact female or male to the group.

One factor people rarely take into consideration is the sheer amount of work and time raising a litter entails. The bitch needs to be attended to during whelping (birth). Whelping usually occurs in the middle of the night, and can take up to 12-24 hours. After whelping, mother and puppies need to be monitored very carefully. Many breeders sleep beside the whelping box for the first two critical weeks. Puppies needing supplementation or hand feeding are not uncommon and needs to be done every two hours around the clock. Mastitis, an inflammation/infection of the milk ducts, is very common in Danes and can be very work-intensive and expensive to treat.

After the critical two-week stage, puppies still need careful monitoring. Once on food, the work really begins, as trying to keep a litter of Dane puppies clean is a 24/7 job. When the puppies start to become aware of their surroundings, it is important to begin socialization and body handling.

I realize this is a lot of information. I'm also including a web address for the Great Dane Club of America ([www.gdca.org](http://www.gdca.org)). It is an excellent site to gather more information, and learn about what you should be breeding for in the Dane breed. Good luck in your endeavor.

MAGDRL

By Lisa M. Chassy, DVM  
Emory Animal Hospital

Text edited May 2004 by Georgia Hymmen

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\*OFA-This stands for the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals. Once an animal has passed their health testing, the OFA will “certify” (send a certificate) stating the results. The OFA certifies hips, elbows, heart and thyroid. Dogs receiving certification are also listed on the OFA website and this information can be a valuable tool.

\*\*CERF-stands for Canine Eye Registry Foundation. Like they OFA, they review and certify results. They also post information on their site.

\*\*\*Be very cautious of dogs registered with the Continental Kennel Club. Many dogs registered with them are actually dogs who are on limited (non-breeding) AKC registrations. Serious dog breeders and exhibitors do not use the Continental Kennel Club as a registry for their animals.