

BTS BOSTON TERRIER SOCIETY

The Boston Terrier Health & Vet Cost Guide

The 10 health problems Boston Terriers are best known for: what they cost, what they do, and what you can do to prevent them.

10 Health Problems | Real U.S. Vet Costs | Printable Trackers | Emergency Card

By **Donnie Gardner** · Founder, Boston Terrier Society · Author of *The Complete Boston Terrier Guide*

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WELCOME

Welcome. Let's get you prepared.

If you've ever lain awake wondering whether that snort, squint, or lump is serious, and what it might cost, you're in good company.

I'm Donnie, founder of Boston Terrier Society. I've spent 14 years raising, researching, and writing about Boston Terriers. It all started with my first Boston, Bella. She's gone now, and I still miss her. Along the way I missed some early warning signs that cost me stress and vet bills I could have avoided, and that's a big part of why I put this guide together.

Boston owners ask me the same three questions over and over: **How much will it cost? What will it do to my Boston? Can I prevent it?** This guide answers all three for the 10 health problems Bostons are best known for. Every dollar figure comes from a published source you can check: vet hospitals, university teaching hospitals, pet-insurance claim data, and veterinary references.

How to use it: read Chapters 01–02 first (about 10 minutes). Then read the chapter for anything you've already noticed. Fill in the Emergency Card on page 20 today, and print the trackers on pages 18–19. Prices vary a lot by region, so treat them as planning ranges, not quotes.

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Important: please read

This guide is **general education only and is not veterinary advice.** I'm a longtime Boston owner, not a veterinarian, and every dog is different. Always consult your veterinarian about your dog's health. If you're worried about your dog right now, call your vet or an emergency animal hospital. The red flags on page 16 are a good place to start.

CHAPTER 01

Why Bostons get these problems

Most of the health problems in this guide trace back to the things we love about the breed: the flat face, the big eyes, the screw tail, and the compact build.

1

A short, flat face

Bostons are brachycephalic. The short face can mean narrow nostrils and a long soft palate[4], which make breathing and cooling down harder. That's behind BOAS and much of the heatstroke risk (Chapters 03 and 11).

2

Big, prominent eyes

74% of Bostons in a 2024 Cambridge study showed visible white around the eye[3]. Prominent eyes and visible white are linked to eye problems in flat-faced breeds, including ulcers[8], and Bostons are also prone to cherry eye and inherited cataracts (Chapters 04–06).

3

The screw tail

Every Boston tested in a 2021 study carried two copies of DVL2, a gene variant linked to the screw-tail body type[3,29]. Screw-tailed breeds can have malformed vertebrae, and sometimes spine problems (Chapter 09).

4

A short jaw, a full set of teeth

Dogs have 42 adult teeth[26], and an underbite was found in practically every Boston examined in the Cambridge study[3]. A veterinary dentist notes that abnormal bites and crowded teeth make flat-faced breeds prone to more advanced dental disease[26] (Chapter 12).

5

Small dog, busy knees

Kneecaps that slip out of place are often genetic and most common in small breeds[19]. 15% of Bostons in the Cambridge study had one[3] (Chapter 08).

6

Sensitive skin

Allergy shows up at every life stage in Trupanion's Boston claim data[1,2], and Bostons are among the breeds at higher risk for mast cell tumors, a common skin cancer in dogs[22] (Chapters 07 and 10).



THE BIG IDEA

None of this means your Boston will get sick. It means you know **where to look**. Across this guide, costs rise with severity, so catching problems early is usually the cheapest care there is.

CHAPTER 02

The 10 problems at a glance

Every range comes from the sources cited on each chapter page. Your bill will depend on where you live, your vet, your dog's size, and how early the problem is caught.

Ch.	Problem	Boston risk signal	Typical U.S. cost	Urgency	Preventable?
03	**Breathing (BOAS)** page 5	27% clinically affected[3]	**$1,600–$5,000+ surgery**[4,5]	HIGH	Reduce
04	**Corneal ulcers** page 6	5× claim rate (adults)[1,2]	**$520–$1,306 treatment**[9]	HIGH	Reduce
05	**Cherry eye** page 7	3.7× odds[10]	**$431–$991 surgery**[11]	LOW	No
06	**Cataracts** page 8	Inherited JHC gene[14]	**$4,900–$6,700 surgery**[15,16]	MEDIUM	Screen
07	**Allergies & skin** page 9	+30% to +70% claims[1,2]	**$350–$1,400/yr injections**[18]	LOW	Manage
08	**Slipping kneecap** page 10	3× claim rate (puppies)[1,2]	**$1,000–$5,000 per leg**[19]	MEDIUM	Reduce
09	**Spine / IVDD** page 11	Screw-tail genetics[3,29]	**$5,900–$15,000 surgery**[20,21]	HIGH	Protect
10	**Mast cell tumors** page 12	3.5× claim rate (seniors)[1,2]	**$500–$1,000 removal**[22]	MEDIUM	Detect early
11	**Heatstroke** page 13	2.1× odds (flat-faced)[23]	**$500–$1,000; ICU $5k–$15k+**[25]	EMERGENCY	Yes
12	**Dental disease** page 14	+35% claims (adults)[1,2]	**$307–$702 cleaning**[27]	LOW	Reduce

Reduce = good habits lower the risk or severity · **Screen** = DNA tests and breeder choice matter · **Manage** = usually controlled, not cured · **Protect** = you can't prevent the anatomy, but you can protect the spine · **Detect early** = early checks are the best protection · **Yes** = largely preventable with everyday habits · **No** = no proven prevention, but early treatment helps

How to read each chapter

- **Boston risk** (black box): how much more often Bostons are affected, from claim data or studies
- **What it can cost**: published U.S. price ranges, each with a source number
- **Severity**: 1 dot = nuisance, 5 dots = life-threatening
- **Red box**: signs that mean call or go now

About the numbers

Small raised numbers point to the sources on page 21. Trupanion's Boston-specific dollar figures come from its 2019 claim-data sheet. Its 2024 update confirms the claim rates but no longer lists costs, so each chapter shows those older figures next to newer published prices.

Breathing problems (BOAS)

That snore isn't always "just a Boston thing." Bostons are a flat-faced breed, and some of them work hard for every breath.

BOSTON RISK

27%

of Bostons graded with clinically significant BOAS (26% moderate, 1% severe) in a 2024 Cambridge study of 104 dogs[3]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$1,600–$2,800	Surgery estimate, Maryland hospital (pre-op tests and take-home meds extra)[5]
$2,422	Flat-fee surgery, Denver clinic, dogs up to 60 lb (includes pre-op bloodwork and meds)[6]
$3,120–$4,160	University teaching hospital estimate, without complications[7]
$2,000–$5,000+	Typical U.S. range for BOAS surgery[4]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Bostons are a short-muzzled (brachycephalic) breed. The shortened face can come with narrow nostrils, a soft palate that's too long for the mouth, and small throat pouches that turn inside out and block the airway[4]. The good news: Bostons are less affected than Frenchies and Bulldogs. In the Cambridge study, 37.5% showed no signs at all. Narrow nostrils and a shorter muzzle were the features most strongly linked to BOAS[3].

What it does to your Boston

Mild cases can live comfortably with good management. Worse cases mean noisy, effortful breathing, gagging or vomiting, and poor tolerance for exercise and heat. A severe breathing crisis can be life-threatening[4].

SEVERITY ●●●●○ Can become life-threatening

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Loud snoring or snorting, even at rest
- ☐ Noisy breathing after mild play or excitement
- ☐ Tiring quickly on walks
- ☐ Gagging, retching or vomiting
- ☐ Sleeping in odd positions to breathe easier[6]
- ☐ Overheating quickly in warm weather

Prevention & what you can do

- Keep your Boston lean. Extra weight worsens BOAS signs[4]
- Use a harness instead of a collar to take pressure off the neck[4]
- Limit time outside in heat and humidity[4]
- Ask about the airway at checkups. Early surgery may help prevent complications like laryngeal collapse[4]
- Choosing a puppy? Look for open nostrils and a moderate muzzle[3]

See a vet now if...

- Gums or tongue look pale or blue[4]
- Struggling to breathe, or open-mouth breathing at rest[6]
- Collapse[4]
- Noisy breathing that won't settle with rest and cooling

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Film 30 seconds of your Boston breathing during quiet sleep. It gives you a baseline to compare against, and something to show your vet.

Corneal ulcers & eye injuries

Those big, beautiful eyes are also exposed eyes. A scratch that gets treated the same day is usually the cheap version of this problem.

BOSTON RISK

5×

Adult Bostons are 5 times as likely as the average dog to have a corneal ulcer claim, in Trupanion claim data[1,2]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$520–$1,306	U.S. treatment cost range (national average $677)[9]
$28–$71	Fluorescein stain test for ulcers (national average $36)[9]
$100–$300	Average annual Boston corneal-ulcer claim (Trupanion, 2019 data)[1]
Ask	Deep ulcer needing surgery or a specialist: no reliable published price, so get a written estimate

What it is & why Bostons get it

A corneal ulcer is a scratch or erosion in the clear front surface of the eye. A Boston's large, prominent eyes leave more of the eye exposed. In the Cambridge study, 74% of Bostons had visible white around the eye ("abnormal scleral show"), which the authors note may point to brachycephalic eye problems such as a tendency to corneal ulcers[3]. A 2023 study of 347 dogs found Bostons had 2.5 times the odds of corneal ulceration[8].

What it does to your Boston

Superficial ulcers typically heal within 3 to 10 days. Deeper ulcers need more intensive treatment, and severe cases may need surgery, sometimes with a corneal graft[9]. Cost rises with severity[9], so speed matters.

SEVERITY ●●●●○ Can threaten the eye quickly

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Squinting or holding one eye shut
- ☐ Extra tearing or goopy discharge
- ☐ Pawing at the eye or rubbing the face
- ☐ Red, irritated eye
- ☐ A cloudy, bluish or dull spot on the eye
- ☐ Sensitivity to bright light

Prevention & what you can do

- No head-out-the-window car rides
- Keep play away from thorny brush and tall, dry grass
- Gently wipe eye discharge with a clean, damp cloth
- Treat every squint as a same-day vet call
- Never use old or leftover eye drops without your vet's OK

See a vet now if...

- Squinting that lasts more than a few hours
- Eye looks cloudy, has a visible pit, or is bulging
- Any eye injury from a cat scratch, stick or fight
- Eye pushed forward out of the socket: go to the ER now

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Keep your vet's number and the nearest 24-hour ER saved in your phone. Eye problems love to start on a Friday night.

Cherry eye

A smooth red bump in the inner corner of the eye. It looks alarming, but it's very fixable, and it usually shows up young.

BOSTON RISK

3.7×

higher odds of cherry eye for Bostons than crossbred dogs, in a UK VetCompass study of 905,000+ dogs[10]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$431–$991	U.S. surgery cost range (national average $544)[11]
$465	Richmond, VA clinic, dogs up to 35 lb (April 2026 price guide)[12]
$798 / $1,194	San Diego nonprofit clinic package, one eye / both eyes (dogs up to 50 lb; bloodwork $160 extra if needed)[13]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Dogs have a third eyelid with its own tear gland, which makes around 30% of the eye's tears[11]. In cherry eye that gland slips out of place and swells into a red, cherry-like lump. Bostons are a predisposed breed: in the VetCompass study they had 3.72 times the odds of crossbred dogs, and the median age at first diagnosis across all dogs was 0.63 years (about 7½ months)[10].

What it does to your Boston

Not usually painful or an emergency, but it shouldn't be ignored. Left too long it can cause irritation and reduced tear production. Most vets recommend surgery to put the gland back, because removing it leads to dry eye in about 40% of dogs[11].

Warning signs to watch for

- [ ] Smooth red or pink swelling in the inner corner
- [ ] A bump that may pop out and back in at first[11]
- [ ] Redness, tearing or discharge
- [ ] Rubbing or pawing at the eye
- [ ] Often one eye first, then the other[11]

SEVERITY ●●○○○ Uncomfortable, very fixable

Prevention & what you can do

- There's no proven way to prevent it, but you can control the outcome
- Book a vet visit soon after you see the bump. Waiting too long can raise the risk of complications[11]
- Ask about gland-saving repair rather than removal[11]
- Insure early: most insurers cover it only if the policy starts before cherry eye appears[11]
- Watch the other eye after the first one happens

Call your vet promptly if...

- The eye becomes painful, squinty or very red
- Thick yellow or green discharge[11]
- The lump turns dark, bleeds or gets crusty

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Snap a photo the first time you see the bump. It can tuck back in by itself before the appointment, and the vet will want to see it.

Cataracts & the DNA test

Bostons can inherit a form of cataracts that starts in the first year of life. There's an inexpensive DNA test for it.

BOSTON RISK

$58

cost of the UC Davis DNA test for juvenile hereditary cataract (JHC), one of the cataract types Bostons can inherit[14]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$58	JHC DNA test, cheek swab (UC Davis VGL)[14]
~$200 / ~$350	First specialist eye exam: Ohio State / Missouri[16,15]
$4,900–$5,500	Surgery, one eye (Missouri, March 2025; includes pre-op eye tests)[15]
$5,200–$6,700	Surgery, both eyes (Ohio State 2024: $5,200–$6,100; Missouri 2025: $5,600–$6,700)[16,15]
~$300	Each recheck exam after surgery (Missouri; several are needed)[15]

What it is & why Bostons get it

A cataract is a clouding of the lens inside the eye. Bostons can inherit a juvenile form (JHC) caused by a recessive HSF4 gene variant. It affects both eyes, starts before 1 year of age, and can progress to blindness by 2–3 years[14]. Bostons also get a separate late-onset hereditary cataract whose cause hasn't been identified yet, so a clear DNA result isn't a guarantee[14].

What it does to your Boston

Cataracts can take vision gradually. Left untreated, they often cause painful problems inside the eye, like inflammation (uveitis) and glaucoma[15]. For dogs that are good surgical candidates, Ohio State reports that surgery restores long-term vision in 80–90% of cases[16].

SEVERITY ●●●○○ Vision-threatening, rarely urgent

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Cloudy, white or bluish-gray look in the pupil
- ☐ Bumping into things, especially in dim light
- ☐ Hesitating on stairs, curbs or jumps
- ☐ Less confident in new places
- ☐ Startling when approached from the side

Prevention & what you can do

- Buy from breeders who DNA-test both parents for JHC[14]
- Breeders should avoid pairing two JHC carriers[14]
- Test your own Boston before any breeding[14]
- Ask your vet to check the lenses at every annual exam
- If cataracts appear, ask early about a specialist. Surgery candidates need extra testing and often weeks of pre-treatment[15]

See a vet now if...

- Sudden loss of vision
- A cloudy eye that is also red, painful or squinting
- An eye that looks enlarged or bulging

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Losing vision is scary for owners. Keep furniture where it is, block stairs, and use your voice to guide your Boston around.

Allergies & itchy skin

Allergy is the one condition that shows up at every life stage in Trupanion's Boston claim data[1,2]. It's rarely dangerous, but it can be expensive over a lifetime.

BOSTON RISK

+70%

Senior Bostons are 70% more likely than the average dog to have an allergy claim (puppies +60%, adults +30%), in Trupanion claim data[1,2]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$200–$400	Allergy testing[17]
$50–$200	Cytopoint itch injection, per shot (depends on weight)[18]
$350–$1,400	Cytopoint every 8 weeks for a year (7 shots)[18]
$100–$200	Average annual Boston allergy claim (Trupanion, 2019 data)[1]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Dogs can react to pollen, mold, dust mites, plant fibers and certain foods. Allergens that are inhaled or absorbed through the skin can cause inflammation and itching, and an allergy test helps your vet find the trigger[17]. In the Cambridge study, 41% of Bostons had facial skin folds, and a few of those dogs had fold dermatitis[3].

What it does to your Boston

Rarely dangerous, but often long-term. Treatments like Cytopoint are given as needed and can become lifelong for some dogs, while dogs with seasonal allergies may only need them part of the year[18]. Constant itch wears on sleep, mood and skin.

SEVERITY ●●○○○ Chronic, rarely dangerous

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Licking or chewing paws
- ☐ Scratching, or rubbing the face on carpet
- ☐ Repeat ear infections, head shaking
- ☐ Red belly, armpits or groin
- ☐ Hot spots, bumps or hair loss
- ☐ Smelly skin or skin folds

Prevention & what you can do

- Year-round flea prevention, as your vet advises
- Wipe and dry facial folds
- Wipe paws after walks in allergy season
- Don't hop between foods. Ask your vet about a proper elimination-diet trial
- Treat ear infections early
- Keep a simple "flare diary": season, food, products

See a vet now if...

- Face or muzzle swelling, or hives, after a sting, vaccine or new food
- Trouble breathing or vomiting along with skin signs
- Raw, oozing skin that spreads fast

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Take photos of flare-ups. Skin often looks calmer by appointment day, and pictures help your vet see the real pattern.

Slipping kneecap (patellar luxation)

That little skip in your Boston's step might be cute, but it can be a kneecap popping out of place.

BOSTON RISK

3×

Boston puppies are 3 times as likely as the average dog to have a kneecap (medial patellar luxation) claim, in Trupanion claim data[1,2]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$1,000–$5,000	Surgery, per leg (depends on size, severity, arthritis and location)[19]
$1,300–$2,300	Average annual Boston puppy kneecap claim (Trupanion, 2019 data)[1]
8+ weeks	Typical recovery with restricted activity and follow-up visits[19]

What it is & why Bostons get it

The kneecap normally glides in a groove at the end of the thigh bone. In patellar luxation it pops out of that groove, usually toward the inside in small dogs. It's graded I (mild) to IV (stays out), and it's often genetic[19]. In the Cambridge study, 16 of 107 Bostons (15%) had a luxating kneecap on exam, 7 of them in both knees[3].

What it does to your Boston

Grade I may need only monitoring or medication. Surgery is often recommended for grades II–IV. Left untreated, the joint often develops arthritis and becomes more prone to injuries like cruciate ligament tears[19].

SEVERITY ●●●○○ Painful over time, treatable

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ A sudden skip or hop for a few steps, then normal[19]
- ☐ Holding a back leg up[19]
- ☐ Difficulty moving the hind legs[19]
- ☐ Occasional pain when the kneecap slips[19]
- ☐ Swelling around the knee[19]

Prevention & what you can do

- Keep your Boston lean to ease the load on the knees
- Build thigh muscle with steady daily walks
- Use ramps or steps for couches and beds, and rugs on slick floors
- Ask your vet to check the knees at puppy visits and every annual exam
- Buying a puppy? Ask whether the parents' knees were checked

See a vet now if...

- Suddenly won't put any weight on a back leg
- Knee is swollen, hot or very painful
- Limping that lasts more than a day or two

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Grab a short video when the skip happens. It almost never performs on cue in the exam room.

Spine problems: hemivertebrae & IVDD

That corkscrew tail is part of what makes a Boston a Boston. The same body type is linked to some spine problems worth knowing about.

BOSTON RISK

165 / 165

Boston Terriers tested in a 2021 study all carried two copies of DVL2, a gene variant linked to the screw-tail body type[3,29]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$5,900	All-inclusive disc surgery with CT scan and rehab, Florida surgery practice[21]
$10,000–$15,000	"All-in" price with MRI, 3–4 days in hospital and physical therapy, neurology specialists[20]
$600–$3,700 · $800–$3,700	For comparison: Trupanion average annual disc-disorder claims for adult Dachshunds · French Bulldogs (2019 data; no Boston figure published)[1]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Screw-tailed breeds like the Boston have been found to have malformed vertebrae (hemivertebrae) in the spine. Many cause no trouble, but they can sometimes lead to nerve problems[3]. Separately, in intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) a disc bulges or ruptures and presses on the spinal cord, causing anything from mild pain to permanent paralysis[20].

What it does to your Boston

Ranges from back pain to sudden paralysis, and timing matters. One veterinary neurology group reports about a 95% surgical success rate in dogs that can still feel their toes, dropping to around 50% once that feeling is lost[20].

SEVERITY ●●●●● Can cause paralysis

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Hunched back, tense belly, yelping when picked up
- ☐ Won't jump, climb stairs or shake off
- ☐ Wobbly, crossing or knuckling back feet
- ☐ Weak or dragging back legs
- ☐ Accidents or loss of bladder control

Prevention & what you can do

- You can't prevent malformations, but you can protect the spine
- Keep your Boston lean
- Use ramps, and discourage leaping off furniture
- Lift with one hand under the chest and one under the rear
- Walk on a harness, not a collar
- Know the signs. With spines, hours can matter[20]

See a vet now if...

- Sudden inability to walk or stand, or dragging legs: ER now[20]
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Severe pain or crying out when touched

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP If your Boston suddenly can't walk, don't wait to see if it passes overnight. Call the ER on the way.

Mast cell tumors

Not every lump is “just a fatty lump.” Mast cell tumors can look like almost anything, which is why a monthly lump check pays off.

BOSTON RISK

3.5×

Senior Bostons are 3.5 times as likely as the average dog to have a mast cell tumor claim, in Trupanion claim data[1,2]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$500–$1,000	Typical mast cell tumor removal[22]
2–5× higher	Board-certified surgeon for hard-to-reach tumors[22]
$4,000–$10,000	Radiation therapy, if recommended[22]
$1,100–$1,700	Average annual Boston senior mast cell tumor claim (Trupanion, 2019 data)[1]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Mast cell tumors are a common cancer in dogs, found most often in the skin. They’re made of immune cells that can release histamine. Boston Terriers are among the breeds found to be at higher risk[22]. They can look like a raised, hairless bump or like an inflamed spot, so they often go unnoticed for a long time[22].

What it does to your Boston

Tumors are graded I–III. Surgery alone is considered curative for grade I. Grade III tumors are more likely to spread and are usually treated with surgery plus chemotherapy. Cost depends heavily on the grade, the stage and where the tumor is[22].

Warning signs to watch for

- [ ] Any new lump or bump, even a tiny one
- [ ] A lump that is red, itchy or inflamed
- [ ] A raised, hairless spot on the skin[22]
- [ ] A lump that changes size or look
- [ ] With internal forms: vomiting, poor appetite, weight loss[22]

SEVERITY ●●●●○ Serious, often curable early

Prevention & what you can do

- There’s no known way to prevent them[22], so early detection is the goal
- Do a nose-to-tail lump check once a month
- Photograph each lump next to a coin to track size
- Ask about a needle aspirate on any new lump. It’s a quick test that can identify these tumors[22]
- Don’t “wait and see” on a new bump

See a vet now if...

- A lump that suddenly swells, bleeds or opens up
- Vomiting, not eating, or low energy in a dog with a known tumor

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Make the monthly lump check part of belly-rub time, and log what you find on the Symptom & Lump Log on page 19.

Heatstroke: the preventable emergency

Heatstroke moves fast and can kill. It's also the problem in this guide you can most often prevent with simple habits.

BOSTON RISK

2.1×

higher odds of heat-related illness in flat-faced breeds than in medium-muzzled dogs, in a UK VetCompass study[23]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$500–$1,000	Typical treatment cost (2026)[25]
~$1,664	Average Trupanion heatstroke claim (highest: $18,130)[24]
$5,000–$15,000+	Severe cases with a multi-day ICU stay[25]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Dogs cool themselves mostly by panting, and in flat-faced breeds the restricted airflow makes panting less effective, so they have a much lower heat tolerance[24]. Normal dog temperature is about 100–102.2°F. Above that, your dog is overheating[25]. Exercise can be as dangerous a trigger as a hot car[25], and Trupanion sees heatstroke claims run 297% higher in summer than the rest of the year[24].

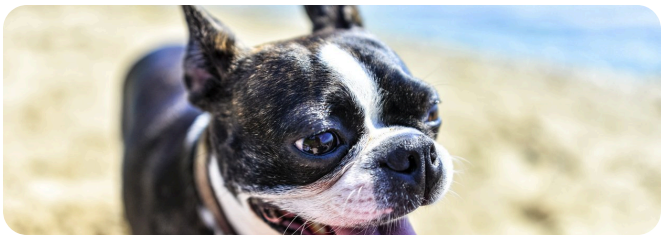
What it does to your Boston

Heatstroke can disrupt clotting, digestion and other body systems. Severe cases can lead to organ failure or death. It progresses quickly, and home first aid is not a substitute for a vet[25].

SEVERITY ●●●●● Life-threatening

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Heavy, frantic panting
- ☐ Drooling
- ☐ Bright red, or white or blue, gums and tongue[24]
- ☐ Vomiting or diarrhea
- ☐ Wobbly or unsteady
- ☐ Collapse



Prevention & what you can do

- Walk in the cooler parts of the day in warm months
- Never leave your Boston in a parked car, even with the windows open[24,25]
- On very hot, humid days, keep outdoor play to 5–10 minutes at a time[25]
- Shade and fresh, cool water, always[25]
- Keep your Boston lean. Obesity raises heatstroke risk[25]

See a vet now if...

- Any of the warning signs above
- A temperature of 104.5–105°F is an emergency even if your dog seems fine[25]

First aid: On the way to the vet: put cool, not ice-cold, water on the groin, armpits and feet. Don't drape wet towels over the body, because they trap heat. Let your dog sip cool water[24].

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP If it feels warm to you, it's hot for your Boston. When in doubt, walk shorter and earlier.

Dental disease

A Boston fits a full set of adult teeth into a very short jaw. That crowding is why dental care pays off early.

BOSTON RISK

+35%

Adult Bostons are 35% more likely than the average dog to have a dental-disease claim. Puppies are 55% more likely to have an extraction claim[1,2]

Cost	What it can cost (U.S.)
$307–$702	Routine cleaning, U.S. range (national average $388)[27]
$350–$500 / $1,500	Cleaning at a general vet / by a dental specialist[26]
$500–$2,500	Tooth extraction, per tooth[26]
$500–$700	Average annual Boston adult dental-disease claim (Trupanion, 2019 data)[1]

What it is & why Bostons get it

Dogs have 42 adult teeth[26]. In the Cambridge study, an underbite (mandibular prognathia) was found in practically every Boston examined[3]. A board-certified veterinary dentist writes that flat-faced breeds, including Boston Terriers, are prone to more advanced dental disease because of abnormal bites and crowded teeth[26].

What it does to your Boston

Untreated gum disease means pain and tooth loss, and advanced periodontitis can also lead to kidney, liver and heart problems[27].

Warning signs to watch for

- ☐ Bad breath
- ☐ Red, swollen or bleeding gums
- ☐ Dropping food while eating
- ☐ Loose or discolored teeth
- ☐ Teeth chattering
- ☐ Less interest in food

SEVERITY ●●●○○ Painful, adds up over time

Prevention & what you can do

- Brush daily with dog toothpaste. Never use human toothpaste[26,27]
- First professional cleaning by age 1 for small dogs, then yearly for flat-faced breeds[26]
- Use vet-recommended dental chews between brushings[26]
- Skip “anesthesia-free” cleanings. AAHA and the AVDC don’t recommend them[26]
- Clean early. Reversing mild disease costs less than extensive treatment later[26]

See a vet now if...

- Bleeding from the mouth or swelling of the face[27]
- A broken tooth
- Refusing to eat or crying when chewing

OWNER-TO-OWNER TIP Start brushing with just a finger and some dog toothpaste for 10 seconds a day. The habit matters more than technique at first.

The Boston prevention checklist

Small habits, done consistently, cover most of the 10 problems in this guide. Check them off as they become routine.

Every day

- [ ] Brush teeth (dog toothpaste only)
- [ ] Wipe facial folds and eye corners
- [ ] Glance at the eyes: any squint or cloudiness?
- [ ] Walk on a harness, in the cooler part of the day
- [ ] Fresh water and shade available

Every week

- [ ] Rib check: can you feel the ribs easily?
- [ ] Check ears for redness or smell
- [ ] Look for paw licking or new itchy spots
- [ ] Watch the walk: any skipping or stiffness?

Every month

- [ ] Nose-to-tail lump check, with photos
- [ ] Flea and tick prevention, as your vet advises
- [ ] Re-measure any known lumps (next to a coin)
- [ ] Breathing check: film 30 seconds of quiet sleep
- [ ] Fill in the 12-Month Health Check (page 18)

Every year

- [ ] Wellness exam: eyes, knees, airway, teeth
- [ ] Professional dental cleaning, as your vet advises
- [ ] Review weight and diet with your vet
- [ ] Review your emergency fund or insurance plan

Before summer

- [ ] Plan early-morning and evening walk times
- [ ] Cooling mat and travel water bowl
- [ ] Know your nearest 24-hour emergency vet
- [ ] No parked-car errands with your Boston, ever

Getting a puppy?

- [ ] Ask for the parents' JHC DNA results
- [ ] Ask about the parents' knees, eyes and breathing
- [ ] Look for open nostrils and a moderate muzzle
- [ ] If you want insurance, enroll before any signs appear



The multiplier: extra weight

Extra weight makes breathing, heat, knees and backs harder for a small, flat-faced dog. PetMD notes that excess weight worsens BOAS signs[4]. In the UK heatstroke study, dogs at or above their breed's average weight had 1.42 times the odds of heat-related illness[23]. In the Cambridge study, 19% of Bostons with any BOAS signs were overweight, compared with 10% of Bostons with none, though that difference wasn't statistically significant[3]. Keeping your Boston lean is one habit that helps almost every chapter of this guide.

Red flags: go to the vet now

If you see any of these, call your vet or the nearest emergency hospital and head in. When in doubt, go.

Breathing

- Pale or blue gums or tongue[4]
- Struggling for air, or open-mouth breathing at rest[6]
- Collapse[4]

Heat

- Frantic panting, drooling, wobbliness
- Temperature of 104.5°F or more[25]
- Vomiting or collapse on a warm day

Eyes

- Squinting for more than a few hours
- Cloudy, pitted or bulging eye
- Eye pushed out of the socket

Back & legs

- Suddenly can't walk, or is dragging legs[20]
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Crying out when touched or lifted

Skin & lumps

- Face swelling or hives after a sting, vaccine or new food
- A lump that suddenly swells, bleeds or opens

Mouth

- Bleeding from the mouth or facial swelling[27]
- Refusing food or crying when chewing

Heatstroke first aid (on the way to the vet)

1. Move your Boston somewhere cool and call the vet or ER to say you're coming.
2. Put cool, **not ice-cold**, water on the groin, armpits and feet[24].
3. **Don't** drape wet towels over the body. They trap heat[24].
4. Let them sip cool water[24], and keep driving. Home first aid is not a substitute for a vet[25].

Call your vet today (not an emergency, but don't wait)

- A new lump of any size
- A red bump in the corner of the eye
- A skip or limp that keeps coming back
- Paw licking, ear shaking or scratching that won't stop
- Bad breath, red gums or dropping food

Possible poisoning?

Call your vet, an emergency hospital, or the **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: (888) 426-4435**. It's open 24/7, and a consultation fee may apply[30]. Have the package or product name ready.

DO IT NOW

Fill in the Emergency Card on page 20 and save a photo of it on your phone, so the ER number is there when your hands are shaking.

CHAPTER 15 · PLAN BEFORE YOU NEED IT

Saving for emergencies & insurance

There's no single right answer. Some owners save, some buy a policy, many do both. Company names in this guide appear only as data sources, and nothing here is a recommendation of any company. (Disclosure: I am a Trupanion affiliate; see page 22.)

$836
average U.S. annual premium for a dog accident & illness policy in 2025 (about $70 a month)[28]

$190
average U.S. annual premium for accident-only dog coverage in 2025[28]

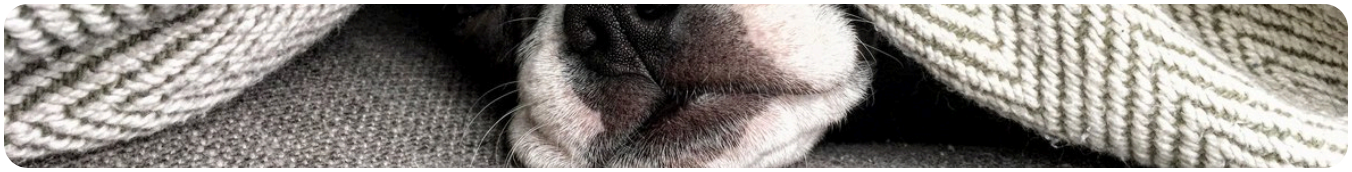
$3,120+
one university hospital's low-end estimate for a single BOAS surgery[7]

Build a Boston emergency fund

- [ ] Open a separate savings account just for your dog, and automate a monthly transfer.
- [ ] **The math:** saving **$100 a month** reaches the average Trupanion heatstroke claim (about $1,664)[24] in **about 17 months**.
- [ ] One BOAS surgery estimate of $3,120–$4,160[7] equals about **4–5 years** of the average accident & illness premium[28]. Big bills can come early, so many owners don't rely on savings alone.
- [ ] Ask your vet ahead of time whether they offer payment plans or accept veterinary financing[5,13].
- [ ] Ask for a written estimate before any planned procedure, and ask what isn't included, like pre-op bloodwork, X-rays or take-home medications[5].

Questions to ask any insurer

- **Pre-existing conditions:** conditions that show up before coverage starts are generally not covered[11,17]. For Bostons, timing matters.
- **Breed-specific conditions:** are cherry eye, BOAS, cataracts and knees covered? A few providers exclude breed-specific conditions[11].
- **Both sides:** if one knee or eye is treated, is the other covered later?
- **Waiting periods:** when do illness and orthopedic coverage start?
- **What's included:** exam fees, prescriptions (sometimes an optional add-on[17]), dental illness, rehab?
- **The numbers:** deductible, reimbursement %, annual limit, and how premiums change with age.
- **Ongoing conditions:** how are lifelong problems like allergies handled year to year?



BEFORE YOU BUY

Premiums vary widely with your dog's age, your ZIP code and the plan you pick. Get quotes for your own Boston and read the sample policy, not just the summary.

PRINTABLE · TRACKER 1

12-Month Health Check

Dog's name: _____ Year: _____ Target weight: _____

Do it once a month, on the same day. Mark each box: ✓ = done / normal · ! = something changed, call your vet · — = skipped · write numbers where asked

Check	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Weight (lb)												
Rib check OK?												
Lump check done												
New or changed lumps?												
Eyes clear, no squint?												
Ears clean, no smell?												
Teeth brushed (days/week)												
Walking normally, no skip?												
Breathing video saved												
Flea / tick prevention given												
Itching or paw licking?												
Vet visit or call?												

Annual wellness visit

Date: _____

Weight: _____ Body condition: _____

Eyes, knees, airway, teeth checked? _____

Dental

Last professional cleaning: _____

Next cleaning due: _____

Teeth to watch: _____

PRINTABLE · TRACKER 2

Symptom & Lump Log

Write down anything new: a lump, a squint, a skip, a cough, an itchy spot. A dated log with photos helps your vet see the real pattern, because symptoms often look calmer on appointment day.

Dog's name: _____ Vet: _____

Date	What I noticed	Where on the body	Size / how often	Photo or video?	Vet called? What they said

Lumps: measure them the same way

Photograph each lump next to a coin, from the same angle, once a month. Note if it's soft or firm, and whether it moves under the skin.

Don't log it, call about it

A new lump, a lump that changes, or any red flag from page 16. Logging is for tracking, not for waiting.

PRINTABLE · CUT OUT & STICK ON THE FRIDGE

Emergency & Quick-Reference Card

Boston Health at a Glance

GO TO THE VET NOW

- Pale or blue gums
- Struggling to breathe, or collapse
- Frantic panting on a warm day
- Temperature 104.5°F or more
- Suddenly can't walk, or dragging legs
- Squinting more than a few hours
- Eye bulging or out of the socket

HEATSTROKE FIRST AID

- Cool (not ice-cold) water on groin, armpits, feet
- No wet towels draped over the body
- Sips of cool water, then straight to the vet

CALL YOUR VET TODAY

- Any new lump
- Red bump in the corner of the eye
- Skip or limp that keeps coming back
- Itching, ear shaking, paw licking
- Bad breath, red gums, dropping food

EVERY DAY

- Harness, not collar
- Cool walks, shade, water
- Brush teeth
- Wipe folds and eye corners
- Keep your Boston lean

My Boston's Emergency Card

Fill it in now, save a photo on your phone, and leave a copy with anyone who cares for your Boston.

Dog's name: _____ Age & weight: _____

Regular vet: _____ Vet phone: _____

24-hour ER: _____ ER phone: _____

Medications: _____ Allergies: _____

Microchip #: _____ Insurance / policy #: _____

ASPCA Animal Poison Control: (888) 426-4435 (24/7; a fee may apply)[30] · Emergency fund / card: _____

SOURCES

Where the numbers come from

Small raised numbers throughout the guide refer to this list. All sources were re-checked on October 21, 2026. Costs are published averages, estimates or ranges, not quotes, and your vet's prices may differ. Trupanion's per-breed average annual costs come from its 2019 claim-data sheet (source 1); claim frequencies were confirmed against the 2024 file (source 2).

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WHAT'S NEXT

Thanks, and here's to healthy years

Thanks for reading. You now know the 10 problems Bostons are best known for, what they cost, and what to do about them. That puts you ahead of a lot of owners.

Bostons bring a lot of personality into a house. Bella certainly did for us, and I hope your Boston brings you many healthy, happy years.

— Donnie Gardner, Boston Terrier Society

Want to go further?

Health is only one part of raising a Boston. My book, **The Complete Boston Terrier Guide: 14 Years of Real-World Advice on Health, Training, and Care**, covers health, training, and everyday care, from puppyhood through the senior years.

Get the book on Amazon →

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FV8QB2HN

Keep learning at bostonterriersociety.com

Free articles and a community of Boston owners who understand why your dog snores louder than you do. Visit bostonterriersociety.com.

Your next 3 steps

1. Fill in the Emergency Card on page 20 and save a photo of it on your phone. **2.** Put the prevention checklist on page 15 where you'll see it every day. **3.** At your next vet visit, ask about your Boston's eyes, knees, airway and teeth.

Disclaimer

General education only, not veterinary advice. This guide is based on published veterinary sources and my experience as a Boston Terrier owner. It is not a substitute for an exam, diagnosis or treatment plan from your veterinarian. If you think your dog is sick or injured, contact your veterinarian or an emergency animal hospital right away. Cost figures are published averages, estimates or ranges from the cited sources, not quotes; actual costs vary by location, clinic, your dog's size and condition, and complications. Insurance information is general. Always read a policy's terms before buying. **Affiliate disclosure:** I (Donnie Gardner) am a Trupanion affiliate, which means Boston Terrier Society could earn a commission if you buy a Trupanion policy through an affiliate link elsewhere, such as on our website. There are no affiliate links in this guide. Trupanion appears here only as a source of published claim data, and I chose the figures without regard to any affiliate relationship. Boston Terrier Society and I receive no compensation from any other company named in this guide.

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