

## Is a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Right for You?

Written by Karen Conant

You've probably heard all of the great attributes of these striking, loyal companions, but please consider the following facts when deciding whether the GSMD is the right breed for you:

Properly raising a Swissy takes time. Does your job and lifestyle allow for the commitment to properly raise and train a working dog? Read on and then determine whether or not a Swissy matches your lifestyle.

Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs are a large breed and require space. They also require moderate activity and regular exercise. A true working breed, the Swissy is most content when he has a job or purpose. Swissys are not lazy, lay--around-the-house dogs.

Swissys are most content in the company of their families. They are not well suited to kenneling and confinement away from the activities of the household. Though capable of withstanding the elements, the Swissy's nature is best suited to being a family member and house companion. Swissys are alert and vigilant. This means that they will bark at neighbors, guests, and just about anything going on in the neighborhood! They have a natural protective instinct to guard home and family.

Most Swissys like the company of children, but NO large dog should be left unattended with young children. Due to the Swissy's robust size and active nature, they can easily topple children unintentionally.

Swissys have several major health problems to consider. In addition to the common orthopedic ailments of large breeds, such as OCD and hip dysplasia, the GSMD is afflicted by a very serious condition known as Gastric Dilation Volvulus, or "bloat". This is a life-threatening medical emergency that is all too common in our breed. Epilepsy is another very serious health concern. All of these conditions can be costly to treat and manage.

Swissys are strong dogs! They are powerful in physical strength and strong-willed and can often be a challenge to leash train. Swissys love to pull. Keep in mind that children (and for that matter some adults!) may have a difficult time walking a Swissy throughout the neighborhood. Because many Swissys have a well developed prey drive, they require a fenced yard for safe containment. A neighbor's cat or unsuspecting squirrel can become the target of chase!

Swissy temperaments vary but are overall quite complex due to their working dog nature and development. Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs are NOT a good choice for inexperienced or first time dog owners. In the hands of an experienced owner, the Swissy can be a wonderful family companion. Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs were originally bred as draft and guard dogs. Like many working breeds, the Swissy has a tendency for dominant temperaments and behaviors. In addition, Swissys tend to be "social climbers". Practicing effective pack leadership is necessary to prevent dominant behaviors from becoming problematic. Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs must learn their place in the family social hierarchy. This takes time, effort and a good dose of patience.

GSMDs require diligent socialization at an early age. This means meeting many new people and being introduced to many new situations. Socializing a Swissy is a commitment not to be taken lightly. Some GSMDs may exhibit dog aggression, particularly intra-sex aggression in intact animals.

Swissys are slow maturing both mentally and physically. Because of orthopedic concerns related to large breed dogs, great care must be taken to prevent injury during growth stages. Despite their sturdy build, the breed is, in effect, quite fragile during these growth periods. The Swissy is not a breed that can sustain unlimited exercise or activities such as jogging at a young age.

Swissys shed!!! A common misconception is that the short coat of the GSMD sheds very little, and nothing could be further from the truth. The Swissy has a thick undercoat which sheds continually throughout the year and requires regular grooming.

If you are interested in breeding, you should know that the GSMD is prone to whelping difficulties and often require cesarean sections. They are not easy to breed!

Finally, Swissys need TRAINING! Prepare to devote the time and energy to ensure your dog has all of the "tools" it needs to become a good citizen.

*This article may be reprinted in its entirety - anywhere, anyplace and anytime - in an effort to educate the public about the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog.*

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