



# BMDCA Info Series

Sources of Health Information for BMDs

2023 #16

**Introduction** ► A critical aspect of becoming an informed buyer of any purebred dog is locating, understanding, and using the broad array of valuable health and pedigree information that is available about a puppy's ancestry. This is especially true for the Bernese Mountain Dog. In addition to the knowledge that can be gleaned from an AKC Certified Pedigree and through the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals Canine Health Information Center ("CHIC"), there is also the potential to gather more information and facts from the online, open database maintained by the Berner-Garde Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to accumulating and disseminating health information about BMDs. While there are no absolute guarantees, knowledge and research can greatly improve the probability of an informed buyer acquiring a healthy, long-lived puppy from a responsible breeder.

To maximize what you can learn from this **BMDCA Info Sheet**, it is recommended that you go to each referenced organization's website as it is discussed. That way you can obtain additional information and instruction while you are thinking about the subject matter and experience first-hand the value of each outstanding health information resource.



Adorable!  
But what do you know about their ancestry? Improve your probability of acquiring a healthy, long-lived puppy.

**What is CHIC?** ► <https://www.ofa.org/about/chic-program>

*"The OFA created the Canine Health Information Center (CHIC) by partnering with participating parent clubs to research and maintain information on the health issues prevalent in specific breeds. We've established a recommended protocol for breed-specific health screenings. Dogs tested in accordance with that protocol are recognized with a CHIC number and certification." Its goals are:*

- *"To work with parent clubs in the identification of health issues for which a central information system should be established.*
- *To establish and maintain a central health information system in a manner that will support research into canine disease and provide health information to owners and breeders.*

- *To establish scientifically valid diagnostic criteria for the acceptance of information into the database.*
- *To base the availability of information on individually identified dogs at the consent of the owner."*

*"Core to the CHIC philosophy is the realization that each breed has different health concerns." With input from the BMDCA (the breed's parent club), CHIC and the Club tailored the CHIC requirements to the needs of the Bernese Mountain Dog. "A CHIC number is issued when test results are entered into the database satisfying each breed-specific requirement, and when the owner of the dog has opted to release the results into the public domain. The CHIC number itself does not imply normal test results, only that all the required breed specific tests were performed and the results made publicly available."*

By clicking on this link - <https://www.ofa.org/recommended-tests?breed=BMD> - you will be connected to the BMD Breed Requirement Page that lists the BMD-specific health-test requirements and provides more links to highly informative educational material. There is also a search function through which you can view the AKC-registered names of BMDs that have received CHIC numbers.

For Bernese, CHIC health-test requirements include: AKC DNA profile, screening for hip dysplasia through OFA or PennHip, elbow dysplasia, eye examination, cardiac evaluation, genetic testing for degenerative myelopathy, and one of the three optional screenings: auto-immune thyroiditis, von Willebrand's genetic test, and histiocytic-sarcoma DNA pre-test from Antagene. CHIC testing is not about receiving all normal test results. It is about whether the tests were completed and publicly shared with the long-term goal of reducing genetic diseases and improving canine and BMD health.

**NOTE:** These same health-test results may also be submitted to the Berner-Garde health database and a "BRT" (Berner Recommended Tests) designation will be noted in the dog's online health record when all of the Berner-specific tests have been completed and shared.

**What health information is contained in the AKC Pedigree & Certificate?** ► The **AKC Certified Pedigree** is a document that lists the selected dog's ancestry for three or four generations. It includes a wealth of information for each dog listed, if one knows how to understand the data provided!

To assist you in this process, the AKC website provides "Details of an Online Pedigree" here:

<https://www.akc.org/register/pedigree/online-pedigree>. For each dog contained in the AKC Certified Pedigree the following information is provided (assuming that the information exists): registration number, registered name, coat colors, Stud Book

For more information, please visit our website at [www.bmdca.org](http://www.bmdca.org).

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dates, OFA certification and grade for hips, OFA certification and pass/fail for elbows, and OFA eye certification.

The **AKC Registration Certificate** is another valuable source of information for an AKC-registered dog. Information contained in that document includes the animal's registered name, AKC number, sex, date of birth, breed, sire and dam (with all of the information listed in the pedigree for those specific dogs), breeder, and owner.

It should be noted that the AKC issues "Conditional" Pedigrees and Registration Certificates in situations when "unknown parentage is indicated via DNA testing." The status of the registration will remain downgraded to conditional until a three-generation pedigree is established. "Unknown" will be noted on the registration or pedigree for the ancestor in question. This will only occur in cases where the dogs are believed to be purebred, but a registered parent is found to be incorrect." The AKC website indicates that these documents will have a different colored border and be clearly labeled. Also, a new registration number will be issued so that people familiar with AKC registration numbers can tell at a glance that the registration is different. For example, a dog initially registered as TN123456/01 would be registered with Conditional registration as QT123456/01. These dogs will be clearly noted as Conditional by their registration number. In addition, the word "Conditional" will be boldly stated on the registration certificate which will have a yellow border (compared to purple for standard registrations or orange for limited).

### **What is Berner-Garde ("BGF")? ►**

[www.bernergarde.org](http://www.bernergarde.org) The Berner-Garde Foundation ("BGF" or Berner-Garde) was incorporated in 1995 to collect, maintain, and disseminate information about genetic diseases observed in the Bernese Mountain Dog. BGF is an independent, tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization with its own Board of Directors. "Our efforts are focused on enabling scientific research, breeding decisions, and treatment options that will help increase the lifespan of our beloved Berners. The current life expectancy of a Bernese Mountain Dog is approximately 8 years. This short life span is primarily due to cancers and other diseases that affect the breed. Our goal is to see that life expectancy improve to 12-14 years."

The BGF established the BMD DNA and Tissue Repository in 2006 with the support of the BMDCA and in partnership with Michigan State University. This repository is a valuable resource for health researchers. It supports the mission of BGF by aiding research efforts to identify genes that impact the expression of canine diseases and assisting in the development of improved diagnostic and treatment options.

The BGF database contains health, pedigree, and other information that has been compiled over many years from voluntary submissions received from owners, other international BMD databases, and public information sources, including the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). The information in the Berner-Garde database is publicly available online and free of charge to everyone. Puppy buyers, owners, and breeders can use the database for a wide variety of purposes, as can veterinarians and health researchers, especially those who are working to reduce genetic disease. Among the critically important features to existing users and those that impress new users are the system's ease of use, robust search capabilities,

and ever-growing database. Mining meaningful information has never been so easy!

To access the Berner-Garde database click on this link - <https://www.bernergarde.org/DB/Default> - and go exploring. You will be amazed at the data you will find at your fingertips! You can conduct searches by people, litters, and dogs. You can run reports and queries on health categories/diagnosis by location, kennel name, dogs by title/award, and certifications. You can generate reports by offspring, owner, breeder, stud book, and more. Functionality has been built into the database so the user can run "Trial Pedigrees" and evaluate a multi-generation pedigree as if a breeding had taken place between the selected sire and dam.

The BGF database is an invaluable resource for the serious, fact-based buyer, as well as for owners, breeders, and researchers. Information gathering has been made easy by the robust search engine and ever-growing database. The puppy buyer can use the data to help form his/her own conclusions about the quality of various breeders and their breeding programs. For example, the buyer would know what breeders are entering data into the Berner-Garde database and who are not. For participating breeders, the buyer can determine what health-clearance testing is being performed or not. If the breeder has been inputting longevity and health information about his/her lines over time, the buyer will be able to access that information as well. All of this information should be combined with insights gained through visits to the breeder's kennel where the buyer can assess his/her rapport and trust level with the breeder. While there, the buyer should evaluate the puppies and parents for both type and temperament. All of these tangible and intangible elements go into the very important decision of whether this is the right breeder and puppy for you.

**Concluding Thoughts ►** Never before has the saying, "let your fingers do the walking," had so much applicability! By coupling sound research skills with good interviewing techniques, the informed, savvy buyer should easily connect with the skilled, responsible Berner breeder, and both should appreciate each other's tenacity and commitment to excellence. While all Berner puppies are cute, sadly not all are "created equal."

If you are currently looking for a Berner puppy or just beginning to think about whether the BMD is the right breed for you, please take advantage of all the wonderful educational tools housed on the BMDCA website such as:

- Other **BMDCA Info Sheets** – (not a complete listing)
  - **BMDs & Considerations for Responsible Breeding**
  - **Learning About BMDs through Berner-Garde**
  - **Tips on Buying a Bernese Mountain Dog**
  - **A BMD Puppy's First Year**
  - **Health Issues in Bernese Mountain Dogs**
  - **Bernese Mountain Dogs & Grooming/Hygiene**
  - **FAQs About Bernese Mountain Dogs**
- The **BMDCA Breed Ambassador Program** is a network of experienced and caring BMDCA members who will answer your questions about the breed including helping inquirers to recognize responsible breeding practices, understand the value of health testing, and learn about pedigrees.
- The **BMDCA Online Breeder Directory** helps those looking for a puppy to connect with member breeders.
- For more information about BMDCA resources go to <https://www.bmdca.org/find-a-berner>.