

## Meet Wendy the Whippet

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One look at Wendy and you'll realize that she's special. It isn't her good nature, but the odd appearance of the double muscles that are prominent all over her body. Wendy was born this way, but it was only after four years that we finally understood what had happened.



Three years ago Wendy's breeders approached me asking if I would let her be part of a genetic study in order to determine why this had occurred. As it was non invasive, merely requiring a blood sample and every muscle to be measured, I readily agreed. The samples were sent off to the National Institute of Health in Maryland, and several months later the results were in.

It turns out that Wendy has a double mutation of the Myostatin gene. This gene regulates muscle growth. Both of Wendy's parents carry a single mutated copy of the gene, and passed the mutation onto her. Wendy was the only one in the litter to have the double mutation. Her litter-mates carrying the single mutated copy don't look anything like her. This condition can also occur in cattle, and one or two other species, and very rarely in humans. I believe there are two children with the condition, one in Germany and possibly one in the United States.

It was by accident that this mutation occurred. Whippet breeders were noticing that the dogs with slightly more muscular builds were among the fastest racers. It seemed logical to breed for the muscular condition, but they did not understand it was due to mutation, and that by breeding a pair that each carried the mutation, dogs like Wendy would result.

One might think that having double the muscles would make them extra fast, but the opposite is true. They slow her down, and she can't turn as quickly as most whippets. It's hard for her to recover after she has run too hard or too long. Her muscles can seize up causing pain and discomfort. Wendy now knows how to pace herself, and usually doesn't let that happen. When she was younger she would run so hard that we would have to pick her up and drive her home as she could no longer walk.



Wendy's condition is referred to as a "Bully Whippet". People who have met her know her temperament is nothing like a bully. She is a sweet heart who likes nothing more than to lie in a warm spot and go for the occasional run. She can appear intimidating to those afraid of dogs. She is black and fully loaded, so to speak, with a booming bark, and a 12 pack of abs. People have been known to stay in their cars until told they can come out!

People are very curious about her! Once the study was published she had more than her share of fame. Wendy and I were flown to New York to be live on the Today Show, and while there we taped a segment for Inside Edition. Three film crews from Japan have filmed her and also a crew from Korean TV. She has appeared on two different shows for Animal Planet, as well as being in many newspapers. If you look up bully whippets on Wikipedia you will see her picture.

Does Wendy know she is special? Probably not although she does have selective hearing when it comes to being called or doing something she doesn't really like. Like most dogs she craves attention and has her own special spot that she wants scratched. She loves her playmates, and enjoys meeting new friends of both the two legged and four legged variety.

I am sure she will continue to have people stare at her and comment when she walks past, and she doesn't mind in the least.

