



12187 253<sup>rd</sup> Ave. NW  
Zimmerman, MN 55398  
P: 763-856-4848 F: 763-856-2474  
www.ZimmVet.com info@ZimmVet.com

### **Heart Disease in Pets**

Heart disease is commonly diagnosed in pets. There are 3 main heart conditions that affect cats and dogs. Valve disease is the most common type of heart disease in pets. This is when a valve becomes leaky and allows blood to follow in the wrong direction. A heart murmur can often be heard when listening to your pet's heart. This condition is most common in small breed dogs. Dilated Cardiomyopathy is when a pet's heart muscle becomes stretched and weak making it less effective at pumping blood. Larger breed dogs are more prone to this disease. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is when the heart muscle thickens making pumping blood less effective. This condition is most commonly diagnosed in cats.

#### **There are four main stages of heart disease:**

Stage 1 The pet has heart disease but is not showing any signs

Stage 2 The pet is now showing signs of heart disease mainly when exercising

Stage 3 Signs of heart failure are evident on a daily basis

Stage 4 Severe signs of heart failure even at rest

**Signs of Heart Disease may include:** coughing, decreased exercise and play, difficult breathing, fast breathing, quick to tire, restlessness especially at night, poor appetite, fainting or collapsing

#### **Baseline Tests**

When a pet is first diagnosed with heart disease baseline bloodwork, cardiopet testing and chest x-rays will help to evaluate what stage of heart disease your pet is in and if medications are needed. For pets that have an irregular heart rhythm ECG is needed. Often we recommend sending the x-rays and ECG to a cardiologist for evaluation. An echocardiogram (ultrasound of the heart) is the gold standard for monitoring and screening for heart disease.

## **Medications**

Medications are started when a pet starts exhibiting clinical signs of heart failure or when the heart measurement on x-rays exceeds 11.5 on the vertebral heart score.

Requirements for starting medications include: Chemistry, CBC, Cardiopet, Blood Pressure & Chest X-rays

Enalapril or Benazepril- Helps to dilate the blood vessels making it less work for the heart to pump

Furosemide- Decreases fluid volume by increasing urine production. This minimizes fluid buildup in the lungs or abdomen

Vetmedin (pimobendan)- opens narrow blood vessels and allows the heart muscle to pump more effectively

Diet-prescription heart diets can provide sodium restriction, which decreases the blood volume and lessens the burden on the heart

## **Long Term Care**

Once a pet is diagnosed with heart disease yearly chest x-rays are needed to measure the size of the heart to see if medications are needed. Cardiopet bloodwork is recommended every 6 months to monitor for changes in the heart disease.

Once your pet starts medications medical progress exam, bloodwork and blood pressure is needed 30 days after starting and every 6 months long term. Cardiopet testing will also be performed every 6 months.

## **Home Monitoring**

Counting resting respiration rates at home are a good way to monitor your pet. Fewer than 30 breaths in 1 minute is normal. When a pet is first diagnosed it is best to count respiratory rates once per day for a week. Once your pet is managed on medications weekly counts are adequate. When your pet is in end stage disease daily counts may be needed again. If your pet's respiratory rate increases by more than 25% (consistently) your pet should have an exam and medication doses evaluated.

## **Websites**

[www.yourdogsheart.com](http://www.yourdogsheart.com)

[www.veterinarypartners.com](http://www.veterinarypartners.com)