

Cardiac Diseases Commonly Found in Pets

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Hear disease can affect our loved ones, including our pets. Animals may have congenital heart disease, meaning they were born with an anomaly, or they may develop acquired disease later in life.

Examples of heart disease in dogs include chronic degenerative valve disease and dilated cardiomyopathy. Chronic degenerative valve disease is a condition where the heart valves become thickened and lose the ability to function as one-way valves. This allows blood to leak backward across the valves, which causes a volume overload and a subsequently enlarged heart. Dilated cardiomyopathy is a disease where the cardiac muscle contracts more weakly than normal, which eventually causes the heart to become dilated. One example of heart disease in cats is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. This is a condition where the myocardium (heart muscle)

becomes abnormally thickened. This causes the myocardium to become stiff and relax abnormally.

One of the most reliable ways to detect heart disease is to ensure your pet has regular visits to his or her veterinarian. A heart murmur is an abnormal sound that can be detected when your veterinarian performs a physical exam on your pet. A murmur is caused by turbulence in the heart or one of the vessels leaving the heart. The most sensitive way to determine the cause of a murmur is to have an echocardiogram performed by a veterinary cardiologist. An echocardiogram is an ultrasound of the heart. It is a test that allows a trained individual to closely study the heart, including evaluation of chamber size and heart function. Chest x-rays are another useful diagnostic tool. They can provide information about the size of the heart and the appearance of the lungs.



Not all animals with heart disease develop adverse effects. Additionally, the various types of heart disease can progress at different rates. However, animals with extensive changes to their hearts may be at risk for the development of congestive heart failure. Congestive heart failure is the condition in which fluid builds up in the lungs or the abdomen secondary to excessive blood volume. With left-sided congestive heart failure, fluid leaks out into the lungs and causes respiratory signs, including coughing or heavy breathing. These signs occur because the fluid in the lungs impedes oxygen absorption from the lungs to the blood. With right-sided congestive

heart failure, the fluid accumulates in the abdomen, manifesting as a distended abdomen. If an animal develops congestive heart failure, medications can be given to prevent fluid accumulation and to enhance heart function.

Symptoms that can develop with heart disease include labored or rapid breathing, coughing, exercise intolerance, abdominal distension, and collapse. These signs can also be seen with conditions other than heart disease. If you note any of these signs, it is important to have your pet evaluated by a veterinarian so they can determine the best course of action and institute appropriate therapy.