

Understanding Heart Disease in Dogs and Cats

Heart disease in pets is more common than most owners realise. Early detection allows for timely treatment, which can significantly extend lifespan and maintain quality of life. Many cardiac issues develop gradually and may not show obvious signs until advanced. Regular check-ups and home monitoring are vital to keeping your pet comfortable and active for years to come.

Common Types of Heart Disease



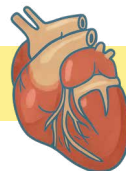
1 ENDOCARDIOSIS



DEGENERATIVE VALVE DISEASE

- The most frequent cause of heart disease in small and medium-breed dogs, especially older ones.
- The mitral valve between the heart's left chambers becomes thickened and leaky, leading to fluid accumulation and heart failure
- Early detection and medical management can slow progression.

2 DILATED CARDIOMYOPATHY



DCM

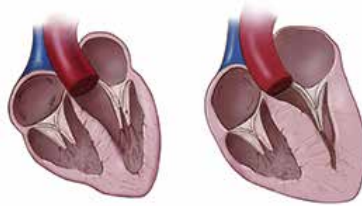
- Seen mainly in large-breed dogs (like Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Dobermans, Great Danes, Boxers).
- The heart muscle becomes weak and enlarged, reducing its ability to pump blood effectively.
- Nutritional forms of DCM can also occur in dogs fed unbalanced or certain "grain-free" boutique diets

3 HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY



HCM

- The most common heart disease in cats.
- The heart muscle thickens, reducing filling capacity and leading to breathlessness or sudden collapse.
- Some breeds (Persians, Maine Coons, Ragdolls, British Shorthairs) are genetically predisposed.
- Open mouth breathing/panting in cats is rarely normal and requires investigation.



LHS: Normal heart
RHS: Thickened heart
muscles in HCM



4 CONGENITAL DEFECTS

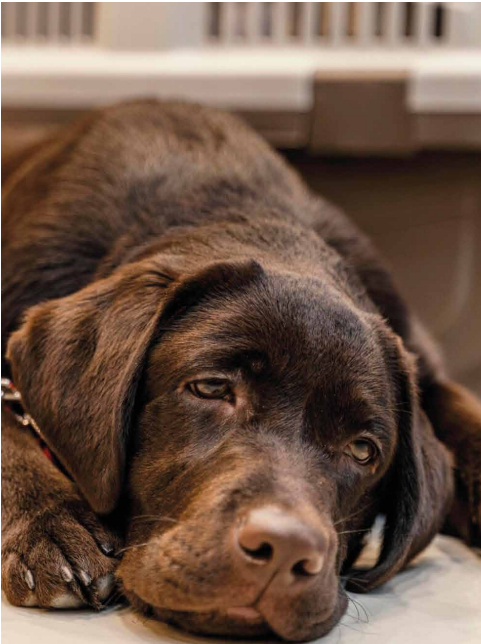


- Present from birth (e.g., patent ductus arteriosus, ventricular septal defects).
- Often diagnosed in young animals through murmurs or poor growth.



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

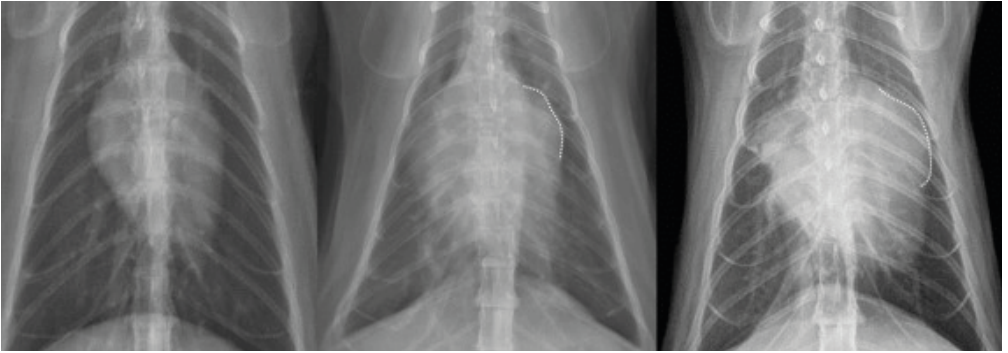
- Exercise intolerance or lethargy.
- Fainting (syncope) or collapse episodes.
- Rapid or laboured breathing at rest.
- Coughing, especially at night or after mild activity.
- Swollen belly (fluid accumulation).
- Weight loss or reduced appetite.
- In cats: hiding more than usual, open-mouth breathing/panting, or sudden hind-limb paralysis.





WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR VET VISIT

- Detailed physical examination with chest auscultation using a stethoscope
- Chest X-rays or echocardiogram & ECG as indicated.
- Explanation of diagnostic findings and treatment plan.
- Guidance on medication schedule, dietary adjustments, and home monitoring.
- Regular follow-up intervals every 3—6 months depending on stability.



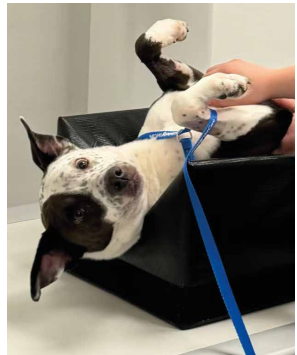
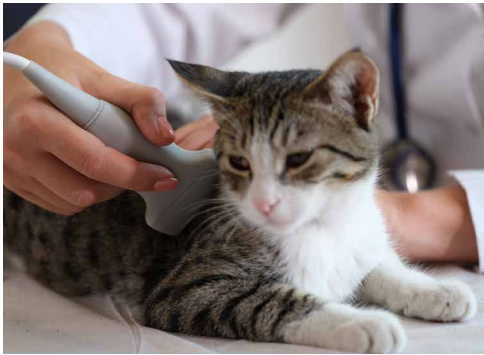
DIAGNOSIS AND MONITORING

1. CLINICAL EXAMINATION

- Your vet listens for murmurs, rhythm irregularities, or abnormal heart rates.
- Pulse quality and lung sounds are evaluated to detect fluid buildup.

2. DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

- **Chest X-rays:** Assess heart size and lung congestion.
- **Echocardiography (Cardiac Ultrasound):** Confirms valve or muscle disease and assesses heart function.
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG):** Detects arrhythmias or conduction abnormalities.
- **Blood tests (NT-proBNP, Troponin):** Can screen for early cardiac stress.



HOME MONITORING

Owners play a critical role in long-term management:

- Count sleeping respiratory rate (SRR): The number of breaths per minute while your pet is in deep sleep.
- Normal: under 30 breaths per minute.
- Consistent readings over 35—40 warrant immediate veterinary review.
- Track appetite, energy levels, and body weight weekly.
- Keep a symptom diary to assist your vet in adjusting treatment.



EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

1. COMMONLY USED MEDICATIONS

- **Pimobendan:** Improves heart muscle contractility and delays disease progression in dogs with valve or DCM disease.
 - **Diuretics (e.g. furosemide):** Remove excess fluid from lungs or abdomen.
 - **ACE inhibitors (e.g. enalapril, benazepril):** Reduce heart workload.
 - **Clopidogrel:** An anti-platelet medication used to prevent life-threatening blood clots.
 - **Sildenafil:** For pulmonary hypertension
 - **Anti-arrhythmics:** For rhythm disturbances.
 - **Taurine and L-carnitine supplementation:** Support muscle metabolism, especially in cats and DCM-prone dogs.
- Blood pressure medication: if indicated.

2. LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS

- Maintain a **healthy body weight**; excess fat increases cardiac strain.
- Provide **gentle, consistent exercise**—short, slow walks instead of strenuous activity.
- Avoid excessive heat or excitement.
- Ensure **fresh water** is available unless otherwise advised (some pets on diuretics may need careful monitoring).
- Feed a **balanced cardiac-support diet**, low in sodium and high in Omega-3 fatty acids.

Myth vs. Fact

MYTH BUSTING SOME COMMON INACCURACIES



“A heart murmur means heart failure.”



“If my dog or cat is still eating, they’re fine.”



“Grain-free diets prevent heart disease.”



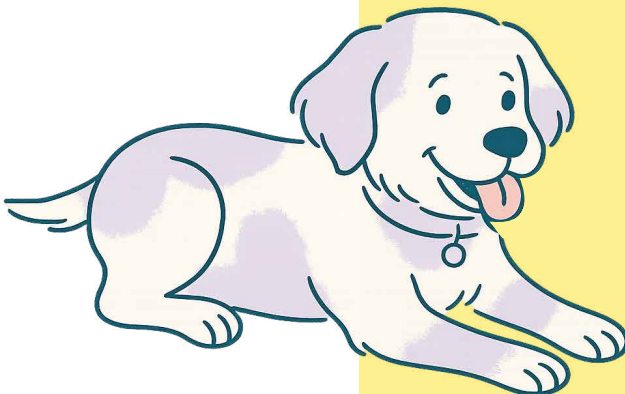
Not always. Many murmurs are mild or incidental and only need monitoring.



Pets often hide symptoms until late-stage disease, making routine screening essential.



Some grain-free or exotic-ingredient diets are linked to DCM due to nutritional deficiencies.





SUMMARY CHECKLIST

FOR PET PARENTS

- Monitor sleeping respiratory rate 2-3 times per week
- Watch for excessive panting, reduced stamina, or appetite changes.
- Give medications exactly as prescribed—never skip doses.
- Maintain an up-to-date health log and bring it to every re-check with your vet.
- Schedule periodic cardiac evaluations, even if your pet seems well.



For more resources and downloadable guides,
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