

## Heart Disease

Cardiomyopathy is a disease of the heart muscle. This is a common disease seen in cats. Middle-aged male cats have a predisposition for this disease, but it can be seen in any age, breed, or sex.

Often times there are no signs of heart disease. Many cats can have underlying heart disease without signs that you can see or your veterinarian can diagnose.

When signs are seen, lethargy or change in behavior/actions may be seen. In more severe cases extreme lethargy, open-mouthed breathing, and purple gums on exam. On physical exam an increased heart rate, murmur, irregular heart rhythm or possible abnormal lung sounds can be noted.

There are three types of cardiomyopathy: dilated, restrictive, and hypertrophic, these are all diseases of the heart muscle. Hypertrophic is the most common form in cats. This is where the heart walls thicken, leaving little room in the chambers of the heart for blood to collect for pumping. This causes the heart to have to work harder. Less blood can be pumped so the heart rate increases. Often the valves leak, which cause a murmur to be heard.

Heart failure occurs when the heart is severely compromised in its ability to pump blood. This causes pressure to build up and fluid to then leak into the lungs causing pulmonary edema.

Diagnosis can be difficult as few signs are sometime present. X-Rays are helpful, but are not always diagnostic as the heart walls thicken inwardly often without significantly changing the size or shape of the heart. X-rays are a good method to detect abnormal fluid in the lungs. Ultrasound is more diagnostic as the heart wall thickness may be measured and blood flow patterns can be detected. Electrocardiogram (EKG) examines the heart rate and rhythm and abnormal patterns can be seen.



Heart Disease, continued...

There are several complications from long-term disease. One is thrombo-embolic disease. Since the heart is not able to pump properly, the blood can swirl in the chambers and can lead to clots forming. The clots are then pumped to the body and can get lodged in smaller vessels. The two most common places this occurs are in the femoral artery and lungs. These are extremely painful and potentially fatal. High blood pressure can also result and this can cause changes in the eye/retina.

There are various treatments that can be offered to help counteract the disease and lessen the symptoms. The prognosis is variable, some cats can live for years, others less so.

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