

HEART DISEASE

PET CARE SHEET

Your pet's heart is simply a hollow organ that serves as a muscular pump divided into four chambers. It pumps blood through the heart, lungs and around the body to deliver vital oxygen and nutrients to the cells of the body so that the body can function. The movement of blood through the heart is controlled by a series of valves.

Heart disease is very common in small animal medicine. One of the most common heart conditions associated with increasing age occurs when the valves become deformed and cause blood to leak back in the wrong direction. This is called valvular insufficiency or endocardiosis. Another common disease seen especially in larger breeds of dog is called Cardiomyopathy and is caused by a weakness in the heart muscle itself.

Symptoms of heart disease are related to the fact that the animal's circulation is inadequate to supply oxygen and nutrients to all the different parts of the body. Common symptoms include:

- a) Reluctance or inability to exercise as normal
- b) Coughing, especially at night
- c) Difficulty in breathing in later stages.
- d) Weight loss, inappetance and lack of alertness.

The symptoms of heart disease are known as Congestive Heart Failure. Although in the majority of cases it is not possible to cure the heart disease Congestive Heart Failure signs can be controlled and animals can, in many cases, lead a long, happy and active life once the appropriate therapy is given.

Diagnosis:

1. Auscultation (i.e. listening to the heart and lungs with a stethoscope)
2. ECG which measures the electrical activity in the heart and is especially useful for diagnosis of abnormal heart rhythms.
3. Xrays
4. Ultrasound scan of the heart
5. Blood tests to assess kidney function and a new test to help diagnose the presence of congestive heart failure

Treatment may include:

1. Drugs to control fluid accumulation (e.g. in the lungs) – diuretics eg Furosemide, Spironolactone
2. Drugs to help the heart pump more-efficiently eg Pimobendan
3. Drugs to improve circulation especially to the kidneys eg ACE inhibitors like Benazeptil which dilate the vessels and reduce effort required to pump blood round the body
4. Exercise management
5. Weight control

Dietary management to include weight control as above, but also to reduce salt.

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