Heart Disease in Your Dog: What You Should Know

FAQs: Promoting a healthy heart through routine and simple heart examinations can help your pet stay fit, healthy and happy.

What Types of Heart Disease Occur in Dogs?

- **Heartworm Disease**, a parasite transmitted through mosquito bites, can be detected by a yearly blood test and is easily prevented by monthly medication.
- **Arrhythmias (Irregular Heart Rate)** can be diagnosed with an electrocardiogram (ECG).
- **Cancer** can affect the heart and lungs. Diagnosis is often made by chest x-ray, echocardiogram or CT scan.
- **High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)** can be detected by blood pressure testing.

**Puppies** – Certain birth defects involving the heart, called congenital heart disease, can be detected in puppies by listening to the chest with a stethoscope. A chest x-ray or echocardiogram clarifies these conditions. The most common – *patent ductus arteriosus* and *pulmonic stenosis* – can be corrected or improved using minimally invasive procedures.

**Middle-Aged and Older Dogs** – Changes commonly develop as a pet gets older. The key to successful management lies in regular check-ups designed to detect early disease and select the most effective means to monitor and treat if needed.

- **Chronic Degenerative Valve Disease** causes the mitral valve to leak, and in some dogs this results in fluid accumulation in the lungs (called congestive heart failure). This causes rapid and labored breathing that can be life-threatening if untreated. A variety of treatments are available to promote cardiac health and quality of life.
- **Heart Muscle Disease (Cardiomyopathy)** usually occurs in large and giant breed dogs, and causes the heart muscle to become very weak. A pet can lose weight, have less energy and breathe rapidly.
How Common is Heart Disease in Dogs?
75% of dogs develop chronic degenerative heart valve disease by 10 years of age, and dogs as young as 3-5 years old can also be affected. Other conditions can develop at any age.

My Pet Coughs. What Does This Mean?
Coughing may result from heart failure, but many dogs also have respiratory conditions. Large airway disease (often called collapsed trachea) is a common cause of a deep honking or loud cough that is often precipitated by excitement. Heart enlargement by itself can put pressure on the large airways (bronchi) and stimulate the cough reflex. Other causes of a cough include heartworm disease, lung disease (pneumonia, inflammation, or a foreign object caught in the lungs) or other conditions. Because lung/airway disease is often present with heart disease, these conditions must be checked in order to provide safe and effective care.

How Serious is Heart Disease?
Many dogs with advanced disease develop a cough, lack of energy, fainting, fluid accumulation or breathing difficulties. This can affect their quality and length of life.

How is Heart Disease Diagnosed?
A routine and simple physical examination can detect heart murmurs or irregular heartbeats. Chest x-rays, echocardiogram or other tests provide other valuable information.

Can Heart Disease be Treated?
Yes, in most cases by selecting effective medications and managing diet.

Should My Dog Have Routine Veterinary Heart Check-Ups?
Absolutely! Promoting heart and lung health helps to assure a long and happy life.

The AMC’s Cardiology Service - Special Credentials and Training
- Training - Drs. Fox and Bond are certified by the American College of Veterinary Cardiology as Cardiology Specialists. This requires completion of an Internship and a 3 year Cardiology Residency training program, following four years of Veterinary College.
- Experience - Each has more than 30 years of experience treating pets with diseases of the chest, including heart, lungs, airways and vascular conditions.
- Research - AMC Cardiologists publish research about high blood pressure which is intended to discover new and effective therapies.
- Equipment - The Cardiology Service utilizes state of the art equipment, including echocardiography, Computed Tomography (CT scan) and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), as well as implanting pacemakers and performing minimally invasive interventional procedures. Patients are treated in our Intensive Care Unit that is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

To Make an Appointment, Please Call 212-838-7053.

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