



Heart Murmur Management

Your dog has been diagnosed with a heart murmur. This is quite a common condition, otherwise known as valvular insufficiency or endocardiosis.

There may be no obvious signs of heart disease at present, many dogs with a heart murmur will continue to lead a normal life for years. At this stage no treatment is necessary.

In the future, the condition is likely to be progressive and your dog may develop what is known as **congestive heart failure (CHF)**. When this occurs, medication and lifestyle changes will be required to manage the disease. It is very important that treatment is begun at the **very first sign** of CHF.

The good news is that your dog may not show any signs of Congestive Heart Failure for many years.

What is a Heart Murmur?

Valves within the heart open to allow the heart chamber to fill, then close to form a seal against back flow as the heart contracts. This ensures that all blood moves forward to supply the body with oxygen and nutrients.

A heart murmur is an indication that these valves, which normally prevent “backflow” of blood, are not closing properly. Blood is then able to leak “backwards” when the heart contracts. This valve defect is usually due to a slight change in the shape of the valves. The cause of this in most cases is unknown, though there may be a hereditary component.

The “murmur”, which can be heard with a stethoscope, is simply the noise made by the blood rushing back through the damaged valves, as the heart contracts.

Eventually, as this “backflow” of blood increases, the heart has to work harder to ensure enough blood reaches the body. As the disease worsens the heart may not be able to supply enough blood to the body, for your dog to maintain a normal active life.

How do I know when it's time to begin treatment?

All cases of valvular disease will eventually progress and most will require treatment.

These are the signs to look out for;

Early Signs;

- ♥ Coughing (usually a “hacking” cough)
- ♥ Shortness of Breath
- ♥ Reduced Fitness (less willing to exercise)
- ♥ Loss of alertness
- ♥ Reduced appetite
- ♥ Weight loss

Advanced Signs;

- ♥ Pale gums
- ♥ Pot belly
- ♥ Severe reluctance to exercise
- ♥ Difficulty breathing
- ♥ Fainting

Contact your veterinarian for a consultation immediately if you suspect your dog is showing signs of congestive heart failure. Some of the signs above may be related to other issues, but in many cases such signs in dogs with a heart murmur are an indication that CHF is progressing. The sooner treatment is started, the more successful it will be.

Treatment Options

Your veterinarian will prescribe a medication, which may be combined with exercise and dietary advice.

There are now new medications, which will substantially increase the quality of your dog's life, and increase its lifespan once it is showing signs of CHF.

CHF cannot be cured, but it can be managed to ensure that your dog experiences a life worth living.

