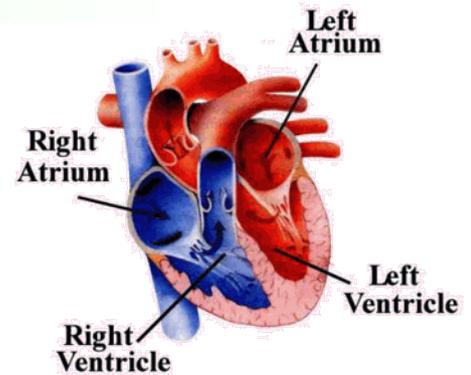




Canine Heart Failure

Heart Failure is a general term used when the heart is not pumping blood efficiently around the body. This can cause high pressures to build up in the heart which can cause dilation of heart chambers and impair the normal passage of blood in the blood vessels. There are two main mechanisms that result in heart failure in dogs.



Mitral Valve Disease

This condition is more likely in smaller breeds such as the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and Terrier breeds. There is leaking of the valve between the left atrium and ventricle. This causes the left atrium to dilate and impedes the blood drainage from the lungs.

Dilated Cardiomyopathy

This condition occurs mainly in larger dogs such as the Doberman, Boxers and Labradors. The wall and muscles of the left ventricle become weak and dilate. This reduces the efficiency of the heart to pump blood causing dilation of the left atrium and possibly an abnormal heart rhythm.

Other, less common forms of heart failure include conditions that affect the lining of the heart, the 'pericardium' and also conditions causing abnormal heart rhythm.



Signs of Heart Failure

- Coughing
- Less active
- Breathlessness
- Fast breathing rate
- Cold extremities
- Swollen tummy



Diagnosis of Heart Failure

Heart failure is confirmed with chest x-rays to show typical changes such as enlargement of the heart. An ultrasound scan of the heart (echocardiogram) assesses the functioning of the heart. If there is an abnormal heart rhythm, an ECG (electrocardiogram) can show where the abnormal rhythm is occurring and which medication is needed.



How can we manage heart disease?

Once heart failure is confirmed, your dog will need medication for the rest of their life. This medication will not cure the condition, it will only help reduce the signs such as coughing and prolong a good quality of life.

- **Furosemide** - This is a diuretic which reduces the fluid build up on the lungs, this can increase thirst
- **Pimobendan** - This drug improves the efficiency of the contraction of the heart and dilates blood vessels to allow blood to flow more easily
- **ACE Inhibitors** - This drug also helps to dilate blood vessels to allow easier blood flow
- **Spironolactone** - This drug helps to reduce the pressure build up in the left atrium and slow down further dilation of this chamber
- **Anti-arrhythmic drugs** - There are a variety of anti-arrhythmic drugs which help to return the heart rhythm back to normal



Before long term medication is started it is advisable to have a blood test to assess kidney function as some of the drugs used to control heart failure can aggravate kidney problems.