

Aortic Thrombo-embolism (A.T.E.)

What is it?

This is when a blood clot dislodges from inside the heart and gets stuck in a blood vessel, usually near the pelvis. This means that the blood supply to one or both of the legs will be cut off.

It is often as a result of a failing heart. However, in cats there may be no prior warning. Often they can show no symptoms at home and nothing abnormal would be picked up on a routine veterinary examination.

What are the signs?

Unfortunately, the lack of blood means that the muscles in the leg(s) starts to die.

This is incredibly painful for the cat so, this condition is normally accompanied by distressed howling.



The cat will not be able to walk on the affected leg(s). Cats with this condition are often seen dragging their back legs along the floor. The appearance can be similar to cats which have suffered trauma after being hit by a car, and a thrombo-embolism can often be mistaken for this. In the case of a thrombo-embolism though, the cat's paws will be very cold due to the lack of blood supply.

How is it diagnosed?

Most often, the diagnosis is made by the clinical examination if a cat is showing all the compatible signs:

- Howling in pain
- Unable to move its back legs
- Cold hind paws
- No pulse in the back legs



An ultrasound scan can be performed to look for the clot, and pin-prick blood tests from the hind paw pads can be used to confirm the diagnosis. However, these tests are rarely required.

How's it treated?

The reality of this condition is that most cats are euthanized as soon as a diagnosis is made. The severe pain and distress it causes the cat is not something owners want to see, and often feel that the kindest thing is not to treat.

Treatment is possible, especially if only one leg is affected. The treatment involves prolonged hospitalisation with very strong pain relief. As the circulation recovers, continuous electrolyte and kidney function monitoring is required. The cat will also likely be suffering from underlying heart failure, which also needs diagnosing and managing.



What does this mean for my cat?

In the last 10 years at Lime Trees, only one cat suffering from a thrombo-embolism has been successfully treated, the vast majority are euthanized straight away.

Those few that are lucky enough to survive will be on long-term heart medication, long-term blood thinners but, in reality, they are unlikely to survive more than 12-18 months due to heart failure.



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If you are worried about your cat's health, or want to discuss treatment options, give us a call to make an appointment.