



CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE IN DOGS

HEART FAILURE OCCURS WHEN THE BODY CAN NO LONGER COMPENSATE FOR A DISEASED HEART. IN OTHER WORDS THE HEART CAN NO LONGER FUNCTION WELL ENOUGH TO PROVIDE THE NUTRIENTS THE BODY NEEDS DURING DAY TO DAY LIFE. HEART FAILURE CAN OFTEN LEAD TO FLUID RETENTION, WHICH WE THEN CALL CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE (CHF). CHF CAN BE CAUSED BY HEART DISEASE SUCH AS VALVE DISEASE AND HEART MUSCLE DISEASE (CARDIOMYOPATHY).

SYMPTOMS

DEPENDING ON WHAT DISEASE IS PRESENT WE MIGHT SEE THE RIGHT OR LEFT HAND SIDE OF THE HEART FAILING - SO CALLED LEFT-SIDED OR RIGHT-SIDED CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE. IN SEVERE DISEASES BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT-SIDED CHF MAY BE SEEN TOGETHER. WITH LEFT-SIDED CHF THE ENLARGED HEART CAN PRESS AGAINST THE AIRWAYS AND FLUID MAY BUILD UP IN THE TISSUES OF THE LUNGS. THIS CAN RESULT IN FAST, LABOURED BREATHING, COUGHING AND POOR EXERCISE ABILITY. THE COLOUR OF THE GUMS CAN LOOK PALE OR EVEN BLUE, APPETITE CAN BE LOST, AND THE DOG MAY COLLAPSE OR FAINT WHEN EXERCISED. WITH RIGHT-SIDED CHF FLUID CAN BE RETAINED IN THE ABDOMEN, CAUSING A "BLOATED" APPEARANCE, THERE IS POOR EXERCISE TOLERANCE, MUSCLE WASTING, THERE MAY BE DISCOMFORT LYING DOWN AND SOMETIMES INCREASED FREQUENCY AND EFFORT OF BREATHING.

DIAGNOSIS

TESTS TO HELP ESTABLISH HEART DISEASE AND FAILURE MAY INCLUDE:

- X-RAYS OF THE CHEST AND ABDOMEN TO LOOK FOR FLUID BUILD UP AND TO ASSESS HEART SIZE.
- HEART ULTRASOUND (ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY) TO LOOK AT THE INTERNAL STRUCTURES OF THE HEART.
- ECG (ELECTROCARDIOGRAM) TO ASSESS THE HEART RATE AND RHYTHM (ESPECIALLY IF THIS IS IRREGULAR).
- BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORING TO SPOT HIGH AND LOW BLOOD PRESSURE.
- BLOOD TESTS MAY BE USED TO ASSESS THE HEALTH OF HEART MUSCLE AND MONITOR THE REST OF THE BODY.
- FAECAL TESTS TO RULE OUT PARASITES.

TREATMENT

IN EMERGENCY CASES HOSPITALISATION AND INTENSIVE CARE MAY BE REQUIRED. IN MORE STABLE CASES THEN MEDICATION AT HOME IS REQUIRED, WHICH USUALLY AIMS TO REDUCE FLUID RETENTION, HELP CIRCULATION AND TO INCREASE THE STRENGTH OF THE HEART MUSCLE AND HENCE INCREASE THE STRENGTH OF A HEART BEAT. THESE INCLUDE:

- FUROSEMIDE - A DIURETIC THAT HELPS TO REDUCE FLUID BUILD UP, DOGS ON DIURETICS WILL DRINK AND URINATE MORE FREQUENTLY.
- ACE INHIBITORS - E.G. BENAZEPRIL (*FORTEKOR*) - THESE HELP TO AID CIRCULATION AND CAN BE MADE MORE POTENT BY USING A SYNERGISTIC DRUG LIKE SPIRONOLACTONE (*PRILACTONE*).
- PIMOBENDAN (*VETMEDIN*) - THIS HELPS TO INCREASE THE FORCE OF EACH HEART BEAT, THUS PUMPING MORE BLOOD ROUND THE BODY AND INCREASING CIRCULATION.
- HUMAN HEART MEDICATION, SUCH AS DIGOXIN, CO-AMILOZIDE, DILTIAZEM OR BETA BLOCKERS MAY BE USED IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES, SUCH AS WHEN THERE IS AN IRREGULAR HEART RHYTHM, OR WHERE THERE IS DETERIORATION IN SYMPTOMS THAT CANNOT BE CORRECTED BY USING VETERINARY MEDICATION.

- A GOOD QUALITY LOW SALT DIET, WITH ESSENTIAL FATTY ACID SUPPLEMENTATION IN SOME CASES.

HEART MEDICATION IS USUALLY GIVEN LIFELONG, ALTHOUGH CHANGES IN DOSAGES ARE OFTEN REQUIRED DEPENDING ON THE CONDITION OF THE PATIENT. PERIODIC MONITORING IS REQUIRED TO HELP ENSURE THAT THE PATIENT IS COPING WELL AT HOME AND WITH THE MEDICATION. INITIALLY, UNTIL STABLE, THIS MAY BE QUITE FREQUENT, BUT ONCE STABLE WE WILL USUALLY RECOMMEND ROUTINE MONITORING CHECKUPS EVERY THREE MONTHS OR SO. IF YOU NOTICE ANY DETERIORATION IN YOUR DOG'S CONDITION, OR SUSPECT THAT THERE MAY BE ADVERSE EFFECTS FROM THE MEDICATION, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR VET AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

