

Heart Health

Early detection is helpful for dogs and cats with heart disease. For this reason, regular monitoring is recommended for at risk patients and those with Congestive Heart Failure.

Stages of Heart Disease:

- Stage A:** Apparently healthy but high risk. 6-12 monthly screening is indicated
- Stage B1:** Asymptomatic disease, no heart enlargement on radiography - 4-6 monthly screening indicated.
- Stage B2:** Asymptomatic disease, heart changes and enlargement (in dogs) - treatment frequently recommended with 3-4 monthly rechecks
- Stage C:** Current (or previous) signs of heart failure - treatment required and 3 monthly rechecks are indicated
- Stage D:** End stage heart failure with clinical signs refractory to therapy - treatment based on individual needs, with 1-2 monthly rechecks recommended (often with referral)

Understanding a Heart Murmur

A heart murmur is a specific sound that was detected when listening to the heart with the stethoscope. The sound is a result of turbulent blood flow within the heart and through the heart valves. When listening to the heart, instead of hearing the normal Lubb Dupp sounds, an additional sound was heard which can vary in intensity from a soft pshhh to a loud whoosh.

The intensity of the additional sound heard in the heart, provides a grading system to describe the murmur. For example Grade I is a very soft, subtle sound, Grade III is a sound of the same intensity (volume) as the normal heart sounds, whilst Grade V & VI are very loud sounds that can sometimes be felt.

Grades of Heart Murmur

- Grade I:** Very soft murmur, not immediately audible - careful auscultation (listening) in quiet room required
- Grade II:** Soft murmur which is audible with careful auscultation
- Grade III:** Moderate murmur, immediately audible with auscultation (sound intensity similar to normal heart sounds)
- Grade IV:** Loud murmur, sound intensity greater than normal heart sounds
- Grade V:** Very loud murmur, sound intensity greater than normal heart sounds with a palpable thrill
- Grade VI:** Very loud murmur, audible with stethoscope held slightly off the chest wall

Classification:**Innocent Murmur:**

Murmurs less than Grade III, no evidence of congestive heart failure or syncope (fainting) & physiological murmurs (disappear by 3-6 months of age)

Pathological Murmur:

Murmurs greater than Grade III, evidence of congestive heart failure or syncope and progression in intensity.

Whilst heart murmurs can develop at any stage of life, the significance of the heart murmur can vary depending on age of onset and concurrent disease status.

Often detection of a heart murmur is a surprise to owners as many dogs with murmurs seem or appear normal with no obvious signs or symptoms of heart disease.

The presence of a heart murmur is an indication of underlying heart disease and further diagnostic work is required to reach a diagnosis.

A diagnostic work-up will often include a blood profile with a particular enzyme which measures the level of heart stretching (cardiopet proBNP), chest radiology (x-rays) and possible referral for an electrocardiogram [ECG] and echocardiogram [echo].

Resting Respiration (Breathing) Rate

1. Observe your pet resting quietly or sleeping
2. Count the number of complete breaths (in and out/up and down) in 60 seconds
3. Record this number on your calendar or in your diary for your next veterinary check up

Changes from normal rate for your pet of more than 25%, or respiration above 35 breaths per minute, may indicate heart issues are worsening and you should give us a call to make an appointment.

If your pet is not showing any signs of heart disease, it is possible that significant changes have not yet developed to a point where they affect the normal functioning of the heart. However, rapid progression can occur, and therefore gaining as much information diagnostically as possible, will allow early recognition of disease and prompt treatment if required.