



**Good Friends  
Animal  
Hospital**

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## *Heart Disease in Dogs and Cats*

Heart disease, whether age-related or a congenital birth defect, can be managed with proper diagnosis and treatment. Heart disease usually manifests itself with symptoms pertaining to the lungs. Signs of heart disease include coughing, panting, decreased exercise tolerance, weakness, dizziness or even fainting. A cat rarely pants unless it is very nervous – a cat panting after exercise should be examined and have x-rays taken immediately! Heart disease may be diagnosed during a physical exam by listening to the heart and lungs. Chest x-rays, often an EKG, and blood pressure monitoring can also be performed. A heartworm test is often recommended as well.

When the heart is sick, it doesn't pump effectively and "leaks" blood back into the heart chamber—this is what causes a "murmur". The heart tries to compensate by either pumping faster to get the same amount of blood to the tissues or enlarging to pump more blood in the same amount of time. As the heart enlarges, it "pushes up" on the major airway passages in the lungs, causing coughing. As the heart fails, fluid will seep from the blood into the lungs reducing oxygen exchange which leads to panting, weakness, and coughing.

The goals of therapy are to increase the amount of oxygen in the blood, reduce or eliminate coughing, and, if indicated, treat for secondary pneumonia caused by fluid in the lungs. Treatment may also help slow down the progression of the disease. Here is our line of attack:

- Furosemide, a diuretic to remove fluid. We start at an appropriate dose to control symptoms, then adjust the dose to get maximum control with the least drug dose. Pets on furosemide need to be monitored with blood tests.
- Diet—a diet low in sodium with added potassium and B-complex vitamins is indicated such as a prescription heart or kidney diet. We also advise weight loss if the pet is overweight.
- Heart medication—there are a variety of medications available depending on the type of heart condition. For example, some increase the strength of the heart pumping, while others slow down the heart thereby increasing blood flow. Blood pressure medicine is prescribed if needed.
- Coenzyme Q10—an essential enzyme that helps the heart muscle.