

My dog has heart failure

Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists

Stephen Collins, BVetMed, CertVC, MRCVS

Tobias Wagner, Dip ECVIM (CA), Dr.med.vet., MRCVS, European Specialist in Veterinary Cardiology

Hear failure is a common problem in dogs. It is often related to leaky heart valves (valvular insufficiency), but it can also be the result of a weak heart muscle (dilated cardiomyopathy, DCM), congenital heart disease or other problems.

Heart failure – what does that mean?

If your dog has heart failure, then the heart is not able to pump the blood normally. This usually results in congestion of blood in the lung leading to breathing problems. Dogs with heart failure may also show signs such as cough, exercise intolerance or collapse.

How dangerous is it?

Heart failure in dogs often develops slowly. If you know that your dog has a heart problem and if you note signs like change in breathing, a cough or exercise intolerance, then you should contact your vet. If heart failure is detected early, then life threatening situations can often be avoided in dogs. Sometimes however, heart failure can develop very suddenly resulting in a life threatening situation.

What can be done?

Apart from a few congenital conditions, there is no way to 'repair' your dogs heart. However, there are several medications, which will help the heart to cope when it starts to fail. Although all dogs with heart failure will receive a diuretic, there is a large variation in the dose required and in additional medications which can be used. An accurate diagnosis of the underlying disease and assessment of other vital parameters, such as blood pressure and kidney function, is important to decide about the correct dose and type of medications.

Will my dog suffer or is it worth to treat?

Heart failure is not painful, but it does affect quality and length of life. The aim with treatment is to give your dog a normal quality of life for as long as possible. Veterinary cardiologists are very experienced at managing heart failure

in dogs and can often achieve very good results even in cases with advanced disease.

How long will my dog live?

This depends on several factors. The type of underlying heart disease has a large influence on the survival time. Also it depends how other body functions (e.g. kidney function, blood pressure) cope with heart disease and medication effects. In general, dogs with leaky mitral valves and heart failure can do well for a long period of time (50% of dogs with mitral valve disease and heart failure live longer than one year if treated appropriately). Dogs with dilated cardiomyopathy and heart failure sadly fare much worse if the disease is progressed to heart failure.

How often do I need to bring my dog to the vet after heart failure has developed?

Treatment of heart failure needs to be monitored, as the heart problem will progress and medication will need to be adjusted as time goes on. Rechecks are really important, however at our clinic, we try to keep the number of rechecks to a minimum. We teach dog owners how to monitor for signs of deterioration and we try to talk to you on the telephone on a regular basis, helping you to manage your dogs heart disease.

Information about SCVS

We provide cardiology referral services for veterinary practices in much the same way that a medical consultant would for general practitioner (GP) practices in the field of human medicine. We work closely with your vet, using our specialist knowledge, experience and equipment to help provide the best possible treatment for your pet.

We provide a 24/7 cardiology referral service to vets across Southern England, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands.

We are aware that referral services can be expensive, however there are usually lots of options for managing your pets particular problem. You can be sure we will do our best to find the best and most cost effective solution for you and your animal.