

My dog is coughing

Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists

Stephen Collins, BVetMed, CertVC, MRCVS

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

Cough is a common problem in dogs. Although often nothing to worry about, cough can be a sign of serious underlying disease, such as heart disease. Investigation is always recommended to diagnose the cause of cough and to determine if treatment is required.

What are common underlying causes?

- Heart disease
- Diseases causing inflammation and / or infection of the respiratory tract (airways and lungs)
- Collapsing trachea (windpipe) or bronchi
- Lungworm infestation
- Foreign bodies
- Cancer
- Laryngeal paralysis

What should be done?

After listening to your dog's heart and lungs, your vet will usually recommend radiographs (X-rays) of the chest, which will help to determine if the heart, respiratory tract or both should be investigated further. Suspected heart disease is best investigated by performing an ultrasound examination of the heart (echocardiography). Investigation of respiratory disease usually requires bronchoscopy (camera examination) of the airways, which can identify a variety of problems such as tracheal collapse, foreign bodies and inflammation. Bronchoscopy also enables us to take wash samples from the very small lower airways which we cannot see, allowing us to determine if inflammation and/or infection is present.

What can be done against the cough?

Treating the underlying disease rather than just the symptoms is always best. Cough can be a difficult symptom to cure or control, and can significantly affect your dog's quality of life. Although cough suppressants are often helpful, it is important to identify the underlying disease and treat the cause of the

cough first. Treatment very much depends on the diagnosis, which is why investigation is so important if cough is to be successfully managed.

Cough and heart disease

Coughing because of heart disease is sometimes caused by a large heart pressing on the airways stimulating the cough reflex. Your dog may also have congestive heart failure. Thorough investigation of heart disease is essential for optimal treatment for your dog, ensuring we are not using inappropriate (and often very expensive) heart medication when congestive heart failure is not present, or ensuring we are giving appropriate amounts and combinations of treatment when congestive heart failure is present.

Cough and airway disease

Some diseases like lungworm infestation or a bacterial infection can be cured, whereas other diseases require lifelong management. Treatment varies depending on the underlying disease. A chronic allergic airway inflammation will respond well to treatment with steroids, but this treatment can be detrimental if an infection is present. Correct diagnosis prior treatment is therefore important.

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 pet's 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.