



Navarro Small Animal Clinic

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Heart Disease and Your Pet

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Cardiovascular problems are very common in our furry friends. Mitral valve disease and dilated cardiomyopathy are the two most commonly diagnosed heart conditions in dogs, whereas hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is the most common heart disease diagnosed in cats. Mitral valve disease affects a valve on the left side of your pet's heart. The valve thickens and causes the valve to not be able to close all the way. This results in leaking of blood from the ventricle to the atrium. This results in the heart having to work harder. Older, smaller breed dogs are more prone to mitral valve disease. Dilated cardiomyopathy on the other hand is more common in large breed dogs. In this disease the heart muscles become thin and weakened. The heart is then unable to pump as strong and effectively. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is a genetic disease found in purebred cats. This condition causes the heart walls to thicken and become less flexible and therefore the heart pumps less blood.

If you know that your pet has been diagnosed with a heart condition it is best to educate yourself about the disease. A murmur is an abnormal heart sound due to abnormal blood flow which affects the heart valves. Your veterinarian will identify this condition by listening to your dog's heart. If a murmur is detected then your veterinarian will likely want to take an x-ray of your pet's chest to evaluate the heart. Enlargement of various parts of the heart can be detected with this diagnostic tool. It can give your veterinarian a baseline for the future and help predict further complications, such as heart failure. Bloodwork is also an important component of your veterinarian's heart workup. This will evaluate the liver and kidneys, as well as red and white blood cells. An electrocardiogram (ECG) can measure the rate and rhythm of your dog's heart and help to diagnose specific heart conditions. Blood pressure is another tool that may be used by your veterinarian to ensure your pet's heart is not being overworked.

In early stages of heart disease when a murmur is detected, but the heart is not enlarged or abnormal on x-ray it is recommended that your pet get a yearly recheck with x-rays to ensure that the disease has not progressed. If your veterinarian heard a murmur and there was a visible enlargement or abnormality on x-ray then your veterinarian may elect to start heart medications, begin a sodium restricted diet, and do bi-annually rechecks. At these twice yearly rechecks your veterinarian will evaluate x-rays and possibly even bloodwork to make sure that vital organs are not being affected. You will want to monitor your pet for signs of congestive heart failure. These signs include: coughing, changes in breathing, exercise intolerance, fainting, changes in appetite, and /or changes in behavior. If you notice any of these signs, you need to contact your veterinarian immediately.