

Heart Problems in Dogs

Overview

- Heart disease is a relatively common problem in pet dogs and there are a few different types.
- Most heart conditions symptoms such as a cough, breathlessness, low energy and sometimes fainting/collapse.
- Thanks to modern medicine, many heart conditions can be well controlled with a combination of medication and monitoring.
- Always speak to your vet if you are concerned about your dog's heart.

General information



Heart disease is a common problem in pet dogs and there are many different types. Any dog can develop heart disease but some breeds are particularly prone to certain types (such as [Mitral valve disease](#) in the [Cavalier King Charles Spaniel](#), and Dilated cardiomyopathy in the [Doberman](#)). It can be scary if your dog is diagnosed with a heart problem, but fortunately, many common types can be well controlled with a combination of medicines, monitoring and lifestyle control.

Symptoms

Most heart problems cause similar symptoms, especially in the early stages. Common symptoms include:

- [Coughing](#)

- Breathlessness or heavy breathing
- Panting more
- [Lethargy \(low energy\)](#)
- Exercise intolerance (slowing down on walks)
- A heart murmur (heard by your vet)
- [Collapse/fainting](#)
- Weight loss
- Abdominal swelling

Types of heart disease

Some of the common types of heart disease in dogs include:

[Mitral valve disease \(MVD\)](#) - a problem with the mitral valve inside the heart, common in small breeds such as the [Cavalier King Charles Spaniel](#), [Dachshund](#) and certain terriers.

Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) - a weakness in the heart muscle that causes a big floppy heart unable to pump blood around the body properly. DCM is very common in large and giant breed dogs such as the [Doberman](#) and [Great Dane](#).

Arrhythmias - an abnormal heart beat rhythm that can cause fainting episodes

Pericardial disease - a problem with the sack that sits around the heart.

Congenital heart disease - a heart problem a puppy is born with. Congenital heart disease is usually quite serious, but fortunately, is also rare. There are many different types of congenital heart disease, including:

- Patent ductus arteriosus (PDA)
- Pulmonic stenosis
- Aortic stenosis
- Atrial septal defects (ASD)
- Ventricular septal defects (VSD)
- Tetralogy of Fallot

When to contact your vet

Always contact your vet if your dog has symptoms of a heart problem.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

Treatment

The treatment your dog needs will depend on the type of heart disease they have.

- **Monitoring.** Some heart conditions don't need treatment in their early stages. However, if this is the case, it's important to monitor them closely and take them for regular heart checks.
- **Medication.** Most common types of heart disease can be managed with medicines, careful monitoring and the right care. Treatment with medications doesn't often cure the problem, but it can significantly slow progression down and reduce symptoms. It's important to be aware that, even with medication, most dogs with heart disease develop worse symptoms in time.
- **Surgery.** There are certain types of heart disease (mostly rare, congenital heart diseases) that can be treated with an operation. Surgery can be very successful, but is only useful for specific types of heart disease. It's important to know that heart surgery has significant risks, can be expensive and is usually only performed in a specialist veterinary centre.

Follow the links above for more information about the different types of heart disease.

Prevention

Screening programs. Because some breeds are prone to heart disease, screening programs have been set up to prevent problems being continually passed from parents to their puppies. If you are considering getting a dog, make sure you do your research and

check what screening might be necessary before you pick a puppy or breeder.

Cost

Treatment for heart disease can be very expensive especially as it usually involves life-long monitoring and medications. It's important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There is often more than one treatment option, so if one doesn't work for you and your dog then your vet may be able to offer another.

Consider [insuring your dog](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

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