

## Heart Disease in Dogs (CHF in Dogs)

### Overview

- Mitral valve disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, and arrhythmias are some of the most common types of heart disease found in dogs.
- Coughing, breathlessness and low energy are all common symptoms of a heart problem.
- Fortunately, many types of heart disease can be well controlled with medication, regular monitoring, and lifestyle adjustments.
- Always speak to your vet if you are concerned about your dog's heart.

### Types of heart disease



Heart disease is a relatively common problem in dogs, especially for certain pedigrees such as the [Cavalier King Charles Spaniel](#) (prone to [mitral valve disease](#)), and the [Doberman](#) (prone to [dilated cardiomyopathy](#)).

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

#### **Mitral valve disease (MVD)**

Mitral valve disease is a problem with a one of the valves inside the heart. It's particularly common in small breeds such as the [Cavalier King Charles Spaniel](#), [Dachshund](#), and certain terriers.

#### **Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)**

Dilated Cardiomyopathy is a weakness in the heart muscle that causes the heart to become large, floppy and unable to pump blood properly. DCM is most common in large/giant breed dogs such as the [Doberman](#) and [Great Dane](#).

## Arrhythmias

An arrhythmia is an abnormal heart beat rhythm that can cause fainting episodes.

## Congenital heart disease

A congenital problem is something a puppy is born with. Congenital heart disease is usually quite serious, but fortunately, it's 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

## Pericardial disease

The pericardium is a thin membrane that sits around the heart, so pericardial disease is anything that goes wrong with this membrane.

## Symptoms

Heart problems tend to cause symptoms such as:

- [Coughing](#)
- Breathlessness, heavy breathing or excessive panting
- [Lethargy \(low energy\)](#)
- Exercise intolerance (slowing down on walks)
- A heart murmur (which will be heard by your vet)
- [Collapse/fainting](#)
- [Weight loss](#)
- Abdominal swelling

## When to contact your vet

Always contact your vet if your dog has symptoms of a heart problem, contact them immediately if your dog is [struggling to breathe](#).

**Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?**

## Treatment

The treatment your dog needs will depend entirely on the type of heart problem they have. Follow the [links above](#) for more information about treating a specific type of heart disease. However, common treatments include:

- **Monitoring.** Some heart conditions don't need treatment in the early stages. However, if this is the case, it's likely that your vet will ask you to monitor your dog and return for regular check-ups.
- **Medication.** Most common types of heart disease can be managed with medicines, careful monitoring and lifestyle changes. Heart medications may not cure your dog's problem, but may slow its progression down and reduce symptoms. It's important to be aware that even with medication, most types of heart disease get progressively worse with time.
- **Surgery.** There are certain types of heart disease (mostly rare, congenital problems) 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.

## Prevention

There isn't much you can do to prevent your dog from getting heart disease once it's been born, but there are a few different heart-screening programs that have been set up to prevent heart disease being passed from parent to puppies. If you are considering getting a dog, make sure you do your research and check what screening might be necessary in your chosen breed.

## 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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