

## Heart Disease in Dogs

If you are a dog owner, you will probably agree that your pet holds a special place in your heart. But you must remember that keeping your dog's heart healthy is one of your responsibilities.

"When it comes to heart disease, regular visits to your veterinarian could mean the difference between life and premature death," says Dr. Joanne Bicknese. "Dog owners may not realize that their pets are susceptible to many forms of heart disease. In most cases, heart disease can be successfully managed with early detection and treatment".

### What is Heart Disease in Dogs?

Heart disease in dogs, as in people, can be either present at birth or acquired, often developing during middle age. Acquired heart disease is more common, affecting many older dogs.

### Are there different types of heart disease in dogs?

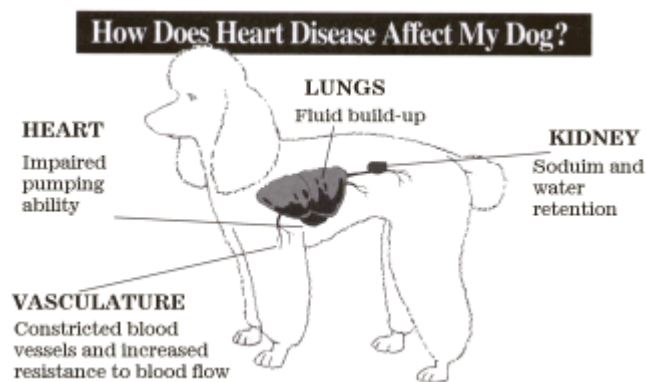
Yes, there are two common types of heart disease in dogs:

- In one type, a dog's heart valves lose their ability to close properly, causing abnormal blood flow.
- In the other type, the muscular walls of a dog's heart become thinned and weakened.

Both types develop gradually over time and result in the same serious condition called *heart failure*.

### Heart Failure

A major threat to your dog's health is heart failure. Of the dogs in the United States examined annually by a veterinarian, approximately 3.2 million have some form of acquired heart disease and may be in heart failure. Heart failure results from the heart's inability to pump blood at a rate required to meet the body's needs. While continuing to work harder to pump blood, further heart damage can occur.



### What are the signs of heart disease in dogs?

Although some of the early stages of heart failure in dogs have no visible signs, heart failure can be diagnosed through a clinical evaluation by a veterinarian. Dogs with mild to moderate heart failure typically experience heart enlargement, coughing, lethargy and difficulty breathing. Severe heart failure is characterized by difficulty breathing (even at rest), fainting, profound intolerance to exercise, loss of appetite and weight loss.

**How can I find out if my dog has heart disease?**

Your veterinarian is your dog's healthcare expert. Regular veterinary visits are important for early detection of health problems.

Your veterinarian may ask you for specific information about your dog before performing a thorough physical examination. If indicated, blood and urine tests, X-rays, an EKG or other tests may be ordered. Regular testing is important for early detection of heart disease in dogs.

"Too often, dog owners do not take their dogs to visit the veterinarian until they are displaying severe signs of heart failure, and by then it may be too late," says Dr. Bicknese. "When heart disease is detected in your dog, your veterinarian can recommend a schedule of regular visits and discuss a treatment plan that can help."

**Can dogs with heart disease be treated?**

Yes. Although there is no cure for most heart disease in dogs, new treatments are available. Success of treatment depends on various factors, but early detection is always best. By following your veterinarian's recommendations, you can help your dog live a longer, more comfortable life.

**Keeping Your Dog Healthy**

In addition to safeguarding your dog's heart, there's a lot you can do to keep your dog happy and in top shape. Ensure that your dog gets a moderate amount of exercise on a regular basis and has a balanced diet. An obese dog may have a harder time staying healthy.

Avoid the heartbreak of seeing your family's best friend fall ill. Proper care and veterinary supervision can help you watch your dog grow to a "hearty" old age.