

Heart Disease in Dogs

Teresa Conway, DVM

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Approximately one out of every ten dogs has some degree of heart disease. About ninety-five percent of the time a problem has developed in a once normal, healthy heart. The rest of the time the dog was born with the heart problem, known as a congenital defect. Some breeds of dog like Doberman Pinschers, Boxers, and some Spaniels are known to have a higher incidence of heart disease than other breeds.

A routine physical exam by a veterinarian is the first step in evaluating your dog's heart. A stethoscope is used to listen for any murmurs (turbulence in the blood flow through the heart) and to evaluate the heart rhythm. Pulses, especially on the inside of the hind legs, are palpated and the gums are examined. Any murmurs or abnormalities in the heart rhythm, pulse rate, pulse quality, or color of the gums can signify a potential problem.

A more detailed cardiac exam is needed to evaluate any abnormalities found on the physical exam. This work-up includes x-rays to examine the size and shape of the heart, an electrocardiogram to evaluate the rhythm, an ultrasound of the heart to observe it in motion, and a blood chemistry profile. A heartworm test is also indicated if it hasn't been done routinely on a yearly basis. All of these tests can now be performed at Brick Town Veterinary Hospital and telemedicine allows us to utilize the expertise of board certified cardiologists.

There are several drugs now available that can be used to treat heart disease. These medications can improve the quality and duration of a dog's life. The cardiac evaluation will help determine if your pet could benefit from one or more of these drugs. If drugs are recommended, they usually are required for the rest of your pet's life. If your pet does not currently need treatment for its heart condition, it may at some point in the future. Therefore it is important to watch for signs of worsening disease like coughing and exercise intolerance. Also, it is advisable to repeat the cardiac work-up every 6 to 12 months.

Dental prophylaxis is extremely important, especially in pets with heart disease. Bacteria can make the heart disease much worse and the most common source of bacteria is the mouth. So, dogs with heart disease will greatly benefit from daily brushing, regular dental prophylaxis at the hospital, and antibiotics before and after dental work.

At Brick Town Veterinary Hospital, the costs involved in a full cardiac exam are: radiographs (2 views) = \$143, electrocardiogram = \$99, bloodwork (CBC and chemistry profile) = \$98, and echocardiogram (ultrasound of heart) with veterinary cardiologist consult = \$186. A 10% discount and a courtesy hospital stay will be applied to full cardiac exams if all tests are performed during a single scheduled visit. Please call if you have any questions or wish to schedule these important tests for your pet.