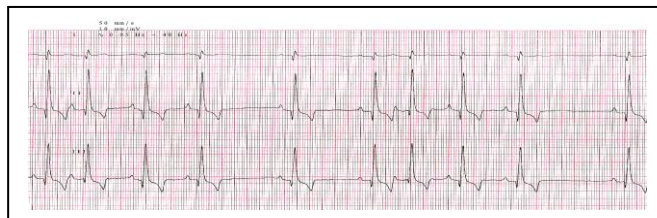


Heart disease in dogs

Your dog has been diagnosed, or is suspected to be affected by heart disease. This may be suspected due to signs you have described your pet showing at home, such as weakness, reduced ability to exercise, or coughing. Alternatively, your vet may have detected an abnormality whilst listening to your pet's heart.

When your vet listens to your dog's heart, he/she will be listening for 3 main things:

1) The speed of the heartbeat – this should not be too fast or too slow
2) The rhythm of the heartbeat – your dog's heart should beat regularly in time. Each heartbeat is stimulated by a surge of electricity going through your dog's heart – this should follow a set rhythm and flow in a certain direction. An abnormal rhythm can be investigated with an ECG which can show the direction and regularity of this electricity.

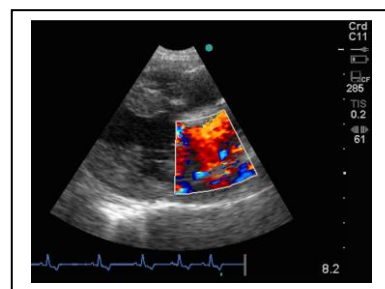


3) For the presence of any murmurs – each time your pet's heart beats, the sound that is heard is the closing of the one-way taps (called valves) – this prevents blood flowing in the wrong direction. Murmurs can be heard as a whooshing sound rather than a crisp heart beat. They can reflect a variety of conditions from 'innocent' murmurs reflecting just some turbulence to blood flow (which is probably non-problematic to your pet), right through to damaged or malformed valves that can result in leakage of blood in the wrong direction and progressive heart disease.

How can we find out if my dog has a heart problem?

a) A heart scan (echocardiogram)

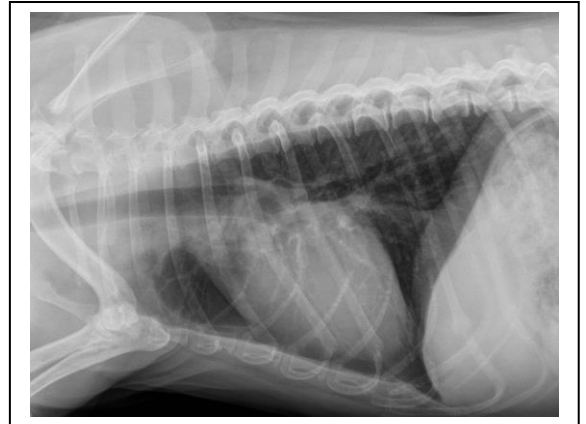
A heart scan is a useful way to help show if your pet has a structural heart problem, and can give some idea of progression and prognosis. This can help your vet decide if and what drugs may be the most appropriate to help treat your pet's condition. It is important to be aware that in the majority of cases, any changes to your pet's heart muscle or valves cannot be reversed, but drugs will be chosen to help reduce progression of the disease and aid in the functioning of the heart. For some levels of disease, treatment may not be required but close monitoring advised so treatment can be initiated when warranted.



b) An ECG

c) Radiographs

In addition, your vet may recommend other further tests to give more information about heart function, long term prognosis & choice of medications. Radiographs can be important to assess if any fluid may have accumulated on the lung tissue and your vet can advise whether this test is also recommended for your pet. It is often necessary for your pet to be sedated or anaesthetised in order for him/her to stay still enough for us to get a good image.



Although we hope that medication will give your pet a good quality of life for a considerable period of time, it is certainly possible that his/her disease will progress. Your vet will be able to give you a better idea of prognosis following a heart scan and/or x-rays. However, it is important to remember that different patients do progress in different ways and it is impossible to guarantee the likelihood of progression.

We hope of course that your pet will respond well to our treatment regime, but it may help for you to be aware of potential ways your pet's condition may progress over time. Progression to heart failure may result in breathlessness or coughing. This may require further medication, or should fluid build up in the chest around the lungs, your pet may require this to be drained under sedation. Occasionally, dogs with heart disease show signs of fainting, and rarely, there can be sudden death.

It is always better if we can detect progression of disease at the earliest opportunity, which is why your pet will require regular checks for your vet to listen to his/her heart. Your vet will also show you how to measure your pet's breathing rate, as often the earliest sign of progression is a subtle increase in breathing rate at rest. This can prompt you to book your pet in for a repeat check earlier than planned and allow your vet to have a close listen to the heart and lungs to check if any change in medication is warranted.

Remember, signs of your pet having difficulty breathing is an emergency.

There is a huge range of conditions that can affect the heart ranging from mild to severe,. Lots of things can be done to try to reduce progression of the condition.

If you have any questions about your pet's condition & how they are doing, please do not hesitate to contact us at Chestnut Vets.