

# Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)



## **Overview:**

Your pet's heart is like a pump that circulates blood throughout the body. When an animal has an underlying heart disorder, the heart is no longer able to pump efficiently. This causes congestion and fluid retention thus making oxygen exchange more difficult. Early clinical signs associated with heart disease are an increase in breathing rate and effort, cough, exercise intolerance, lethargy, weakness, and, in severe cases, collapse or fainting.

## **What are the goals of treatment?**

The primary goal of CHF therapy is managing the clinical signs and decreasing the workload on the heart. This is achieved by alleviating fluid accumulation and improving heart function. Because heart failure therapy is dynamic, it will require regular checkups with possible alterations in medication dosages to ensure your pet is comfortable.

## **Types of medication for treatment of CHF**

1. **Pimobendan** (Vetmedin): Helps by increasing heart contractility and dilating vessels to reduce the overall workload on the heart. This is a chewable tablet given twice daily for life. With early signs of cardiac disease, this may be the only medication your pet is on until clinical signs worsen.
2. **Furosemide** (Lasix): Helps the heart by reducing extra fluid accumulation in the body. This is a tablet given twice daily for life. As heart disease progresses, this medication is often increased to reduce the pressure workload on the heart.
3. **Enalapril**: Helps the heart by working together with furosemide to reduce blood pressure and blood vessel constriction. This is a tablet given twice daily for life.
4. **Tussigon** (hydrocodone): A cough suppressant sometimes sent home to reduce cough irritation when heart medications are not enough. This medication is a tablet that can be given as needed, or up to twice daily.

## **What to watch for at home?**

To detect early signs of heart failure, it is important to obtain your pet's resting breathing rate and effort at home. When your pet is at rest, watch his or her sides rise and fall with each breath. One rise and fall counts as one breath. Count the number of times your pet does this in 6 seconds, and then multiply by 10 to get the resting heart rate per minute (4 breaths in 6 seconds equals 40 breaths per minute (BPM)). A normal cat or dog should have a respiratory rate of less than 40 bpm.

## **Prognosis?**

Unfortunately, no drugs have proven effective in slowing down the progression of heart disease in animals. Average survival time of 6-12 months. However, most animals are able to be managed with medications and can enjoy a good quality of life during that period of time.