



Chronic Valvular Disease

Diagnostic Plan

History
Physical examination
Chest auscultation
Chest palpation
Blood work
Urinalysis
Chest x-rays
Electrocardiography
Heartworm check
Echocardiography
Angiocardigraphy

Therapeutic Plan

Digitalis
Diuretics
Drugs that dilate blood vessels
Drugs that correct abnormal heart rhythms
Exercise restriction

Nutritional Plan

A mildly restricted sodium food or a moderately restricted sodium food. If necessary, change to a severely restricted sodium food

Chronic Valvular Disease

Your pet has chronic valvular disease. Chronic valvular disease is the most common heart disease of dogs. It leads to congestive heart failure and is a major cause of death in many pets. Congestive heart failure can be managed with rest, low-sodium foods, diuretics, and medications to improve cardiac function. This client education sheet will help you learn more about this condition and will review your veterinarian's instructions for your pet's care at home, as well as follow-up with the veterinary health care team.

What You Should Know About Chronic Valvular Disease

The heart has four chambers: two atria, which are located on the top of the heart, and two ventricles, which are located on the bottom. There are four sets of valves in the heart: One at the bottom of each atrium that opens into the ventricle. The other two control blood flow out of the ventricles. These valves function to direct blood through the heart so no backflow of blood occurs when the heart contracts.

Chronic valvular disease results in shrunken and distorted valves between the chambers of the heart. Consequently the valves can't close properly and blood is ejected back through the valve instead of going to the lungs or body when the ventricles contract. The heart enlarges in an attempt to compensate for the overload of blood in the left ventricle and atrium. These changes take months to years to develop. Pets with chronic valvular disease often have congestive heart failure with fluid accumulation in the lungs, abdomen, or both.

Causes

The cause of chronic valvular disease is unknown – multiple causes exist.

Diagnosis

Your veterinarian may detect a heart murmur in your pet years before congestive heart failure develops. The murmur is described as a regurgitation of blood through defective valves.

Auscultation of the chest (listening to it with a stethoscope) may reveal heart murmurs and the presence of fluid in the lungs. Feeling the chest and blood vessels may disclose the presence of unusual pulses. X-rays of the chest and abdomen are often taken to detect cardiac enlargement and fluid build-up. Blood pressure measurement may reveal hypertension. EKGs show heart enlargement and disturbances in rhythms that may need treatment. Some practices use ultrasound to visualize the extent of damage to the heart structures. Blood tests, including tests for heartworms, and urinalyses are commonly performed to assess the effects of heart failure in other organs. Often these tests are repeated to monitor the effectiveness of therapy.

Treatment and Home Care

Treatment for chronic valvular disease is not curative, but can relieve the clinical signs of congestive heart failure in most patients. The overload of blood that the heart must pump can be lessened by low-sodium food and diuretics, which reduce the volume of blood, and by drugs that dilate blood vessels. Other therapies include enforced rest and drugs to control arrhythmias and strengthen and slow the heart.

Home care consists of giving all prescribed medications, monitoring your pet for the resolution of clinical signs, and following your veterinarian's instructions for proper food and exercise restriction. Some drugs that your veterinarian uses to treat heart disease may have side effects. Report any abnormal behavior, such as weakness, vomiting, or diarrhea, to your veterinarian at once. You will need to return to your veterinary practice for diagnostic tests that your veterinarian will use to check the effectiveness of therapy.

Nutritional Plan

If your pet has chronic valvular disease, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on your pet's age and body condition, clinical signs, and on the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. Many pets with congestive heart failure benefit from foods low in sodium. These foods reduce the workload of the heart by reducing fluid accumulation in the body. Foods with reduced sodium are useful for managing early heart failure. Such foods include Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine h/d® or g/d® as well as Feline g/d®. Clean fresh water should be available at all times.

Transitioning Food

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix the new food with your pet's former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). However, do not add water to your cat's food. Feed only the recommended food. Do not feed additional salt or any snacks that may contain sodium. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

Presented as an educational service by



Home Care Instructions

Client's Name: _____

Patient's Name: _____

Medication(s): _____

Nutritional Recommendation: _____

Follow-Up Appointment: _____

(Hospital Stamp Area Above)

REGULAR VISITS WILL HELP OUR VETERINARY HEALTH CARE TEAM PROVIDE FOR YOUR PET'S BEST INTEREST.