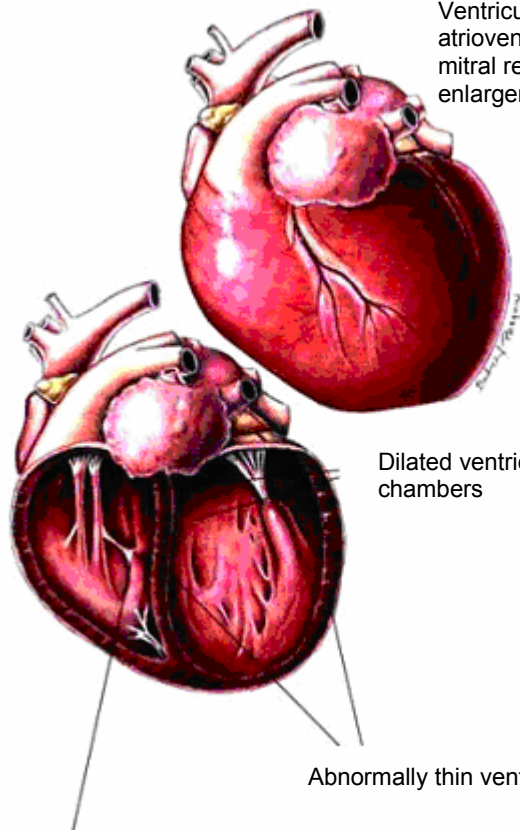




# Feline Dilated Cardiomyopathy

A globular-shaped heart with severe dilation of all four chambers. Depressed ventricular contractile performance occurs. Ventricular dilation distorts the atrioventricular valves leading to mitral regurgitation and atrial enlargement.



Dilated ventricular chambers

Abnormally thin ventricular walls

Atrophied papillary muscle

## Feline Dilated Cardiomyopathy

### Diagnostic Plan

History  
Physical examination  
Chest auscultation  
Palpation of femoral pulses and hindlimb musculature  
Blood work  
Urinalysis  
Electrocardiography  
Chest x-rays  
Echocardiography  
X-rays of the heart and abdominal blood vessels after dye injection  
Plasma taurine analysis

### Therapeutic Plan

Enforced rest  
Diuretics  
Bronchodilators  
Oxygen therapy  
Removal of fluid from the chest and abdomen  
Drugs that dilate blood vessels  
Drugs that strengthen the heart  
Heparin  
Surgery

### Nutritional Plan

Nutrition that contains adequate levels of taurine and avoids excess levels of sodium

## Feline Dilated Cardiomyopathy

Your cat has dilated cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy is a disease of the heart muscle characterized by fluid build-up in the body and clot formation in the arteries. Common clinical signs include difficult breathing, weight loss, pain, and hindlimb weakness and paralysis. It is treated with rest, medication, and, sometimes, surgery. Dietary management helps treat the condition in some cats. 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.

### What You Should Know About Feline Dilated Cardiomyopathy

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. Dilated cardiomyopathy is a disease characterized by enlargement of all four heart chambers. The walls of the ventricles are abnormally thin, and the heart has a severely reduced ability to contract. Cats with dilated cardiomyopathy usually have congestive heart failure with fluid accumulation in the lungs, abdomen, or both. Thromboembolism (clots that obstruct blood vessels) are commonly seen in the arteries of cats affected by the disease.

#### Causes

The cause of all cases of dilated cardiomyopathy is unknown. Recently, it was found that a deficiency of an amino acid called taurine could cause dilated cardiomyopathy in cats.

#### Diagnosis

The first step that your veterinarian will make in diagnosing dilated cardiomyopathy is to thoroughly examine your cat. During physical examination, heart murmurs and fluid in the chest and abdomen may be detected. Your veterinarian will carefully check your cat's pulse and feel its back legs for coolness or unusual firmness caused by thromboembolism. X-rays of the chest and abdomen are useful for diagnosing heart enlargement and fluid accumulation. Special dyes injected into the blood stream help define the location of blood clots on x-rays. EKGs and ultrasound of the heart help show rhythm disturbances and changes in cardiac function. Blood tests and urinalyses are commonly performed to assess the effects of heart failure on other organs. Plasma taurine levels are measured because low taurine concentration causes dilated cardiomyopathies.

### Treatment and Home Care

Your veterinarian may treat the congestive heart failure component of dilated cardiomyopathy with some or all of the following therapies: low-sodium foods, foods with proper taurine levels, rest, diuretics, drugs to dilate the air passages, oxygen, drugs to strengthen the heart and dilate blood vessels, and, sometimes, removal of fluid from the chest and abdomen. Therapy for thromboembolism includes giving drugs to dilate blood vessels, prevent clotting, and break up clots. Some clots may be removed by surgery.

Home care consists of giving all prescribed medications, monitoring your cat for resolution of clinical signs, and feeding your cat based on your veterinarian's instructions. Some drugs that your veterinarian uses to treat heart disease have side effects. Report any abnormal behavior, such as seizures, to your veterinarian at once. You may need to return to the hospital for diagnostic tests that your veterinarian will use to check the effectiveness of therapy.

### Nutritional Plan

If your cat has dilated cardiomyopathy, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on your pet's age and body condition, the clinical signs, and the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. When taurine deficiency is the cause of dilated cardiomyopathy, your veterinarian will recommend taurine supplements or prescribe a special food that contains adequate amounts of this amino acid. Such foods include the Hill's® Prescription Diet® Feline g/d® and Science Diet® brand of feline nutritional products. For many cats, proper nutrition leads to clinical improvement within one or two weeks.

If your cat has congestive heart failure as a result of dilated cardiomyopathy, your veterinarian may give you special feeding instructions. Many pets with congestive heart failure benefit from a nutritionally complete but reduced-sodium food. These foods reduce the workload of the heart by reducing fluid accumulation in the body. Such foods include Hill's® Prescription Diet® Feline g/d® and k/d®.

### 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 or hand feeding for the first few days. Do not add water to your cat's food though. 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.

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*Presented as an educational service by*

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## 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.