



Reducing the Risks of Heart Failure

Some age-related changes in your pet's heart can't be prevented. However, the signs of many heart diseases can be prevented, delayed, or successfully treated when the disease is caught early and the health risks are minimized. This client education sheet will help you learn more about the risks of heart disease and will review your veterinarian's plan for keeping your pet healthy, as well as follow-up with the veterinary health

Risk Factor Management for Heart Disease

A risk factor is a condition or characteristic that predisposes an animal to disease. For example, high blood pressure in human beings increases the risk of stroke and heart and kidney failure. The importance of identifying risk factors is that sometimes the risk factor (high blood pressure, for example) can be eliminated or controlled to prevent or lessen the severity of the disease (stroke, for example). Veterinarians also recognize risk factors in pets. The extent to which such risk factors are managed will help determine the length and quality of your pet's life.

Risk Factors

Diseases of the heart occur frequently in dogs and cats. Among these are degeneration of the heart valves, diseases of the heart muscle, and heartworms. These conditions often lead to congestive heart failure with fluid accumulation in the lungs and abdomen.

Risk factors for heart disease include the following:

- Advanced age.
- Obesity.
- Amino acid deficiency (taurine in cats; L-carnitine in large dogs).
- Periodontal disease. Diseases of the gums and teeth may lead to bacterial infection of the heart.
- Breed. A higher incidence of chronic diseases of the valves is seen in small dogs. Diseases of the heart muscle are seen more frequently in Boxers, Doberman Pinschers, and Cocker Spaniels.
- High-salt foods. These foods may precipitate congestive heart failure in animals with existing heart disease.
- Heartworms. Heartworms can cause congestive heart failure.
- Diseases in other organs.

Detecting Risk Factors

Frequent and complete veterinary checkups are especially important as your pet ages. Your veterinarian will be able to prepare a list of risk factors for your pet based on the history you provide, results of the physical examination and diagnostic studies, and his or her knowledge of disorders that commonly affect pets of similar age, breed, and sex.

Managing Risk Factors

The care your pet received throughout its life can help protect its health and minimize its health risks. As your pet ages, you should carefully follow your veterinarian's instructions for exercise, vaccinations, parasite control, dental care, grooming, nutrition, and routine examinations and diagnostic tests.

Nutrition Plan

As your pet ages your veterinarian may recommend a dietary change to reduce the nutritional risks that contribute to heart disease and failure. Optimal nutrition provides the right amounts of nutrients, such as proper levels of amino acids (taurine, L-carnitine), for tissue maintenance and repair. More important, proper nutrition avoids harmful excesses of sodium, which can cause congestive heart failure in patients with heart disease, and calories, which can cause obesity. Further, optimal nutrition should avoid harmful levels of protein, phosphorus, and calcium to reduce the risks of kidney disease and failure. Foods that avoid these harmful excesses and provide proper nutrition for each life stage include Hill's® Science Diet® brand of pet foods for cats and dogs.

If your pet is particularly at risk for congestive heart failure, your veterinarian may recommend a low-sodium dietary product such as Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine k/d®, Canine h/d®, or Feline g/d®.

If your pet is overweight, your veterinarian may recommend a low-fat, high-fiber food formulated for the treatment of obesity. Such foods include Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine r/d® and Feline r/d®. For prevention of weight gain in obese-prone pets, your veterinarian may recommend a lower-calorie, increased fiber food such as Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine w/d® and Feline w/d® or Feline m/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, 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. 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.