

HOME MONITORING OF THE CARDIAC PATIENT

Now that your pet has been diagnosed with a heart problem it is important that we monitor them closely. We will do that with frequent health checks at the clinic where we will listen to the heart and check their overall health. It is equally important that you, their owner, is able to monitor them closely at home. There are several things that you can monitor, easily and more accurately in their own home.

1/ Resting respiratory rate - The rate at which your pet is breathing.

The best time to monitor this is when your pet is asleep. Simply count how many breaths they take in a minute. You may need to get someone to help you by timing while you count. Our aim is to keep your pet breathing less than 30 breaths per minute. As you do this you will also note the type of breathing, how deep they are breathing and whether they are using their tummy muscles as well as their chest to breathe. Any change in the rate of breathing, or the type of breathing needs that your pet needs to be checked by the vet.

2/ Resting heart rate - The rate at which your pet's heart is beating.

This is a bit harder but with practice is able to be monitored at home. Your pet needs to be asleep or resting, Hold your hand on the left side of your pet's chest, just behind their elbow. You should be able to feel their heartbeat. The next trick is to be able to count the rate. This becomes easier with practice!. Your vet may be able to show you some easy ways to do this. Again it helps if someone else can do the timing while you try and count. We are aiming to keep the heart rate less than 150 at rest.

3/ Weekly weight and girth checks

Heart patients often lose weight, yet get a distended abdomen. It is important to monitor not only their overall weight but also the size of their abdomen. Your pet should ideally be weighed weekly. A quick tape measure around the middle of their abdomen will give a girth measurement. The measurement itself is not important, what is important is if it changes. It is important that the same person measures each time so it is consistent.

4/ Thirst and Appetite - Often heart patients lose their appetite and drink excessively.

We expect most heart patients on diuretics such as furosemide will drink excessively. It is important to keep track of how much they are drinking and watch for changes in water intake. The easiest way to do this is to measure out a litre (or two) into a bowl. If you check how much is left after 24 hours you will be able to check how much they are drinking. If more than one animal is drinking at this bowl it is still useful to monitor as any changes will most likely be from the heart patient. Heart patients sometimes feel unwell and lose their appetite. They may still be eating, but not as vigorously as they used to. They may become very fussy with the type of their food, or they may just pick at their food. Poor appetite is a sign that our heart patient is not doing well and needs to be checked.

5/ Exercise regime and exercise tolerance.

It is important to monitor what type of exercise your pet does, and how long they do it for. If your pet routinely walks for 30 minutes but recently gets tired or slow down halfway through then we know that their ability to exercise is reduced. It is useful to note if your pet loves running, or only walking, if they like big, or only short walks. Record if they get tired, or easily puffed out. It is very important that if a heart patient suddenly gets tired or seems unable to continue, do not force them!. Give them time to rest, carry them home, or call someone to pick them up.

6/ Coughing - When the heart is not working well fluid accumulates in the lungs and causes

coughing.

Coughing is one of the most important factors to monitor. Coughing shows us that the heart is starting to fail and that fluid is being retained in the lungs. We will often adjust the dose, or type of diuretic used, depending on how bad your pet's coughing is. We would like you to monitor and record your pet's coughing- how often they cough, how repetitive it is, whether it is all the time, just during sleep, after meals, or just at nighttime. Also note if it is soft or loud and whether it is distressing to your pet. If you have a video camera, or mobile phone it can be handy to take video footage of your pet coughing to show us. i

All of these factors allow you and us to monitor your pet and their response to treatment. What we are looking for is overall CHANGES to any of these factors. It is ok if your pet has always been a picky eater, but it is not ok if your always-hungry dog starts to get picky with their food. A diary monitoring all of the above factors allows us to follow what is happening at home, and also alerts you quickly if there is any changes in your pet's health. Treating heart disease is a challenging task and often involves fine tuning types and doses of drugs and we can do this more effectively when we know what is happening at home. Unfortunately heart disease in pets is not curable, and is almost always progressive, but with the right medications, at the right dose we are hoping that we can slow it down, while maintaining the quality of your pet's life.