

# WHAT IS HEART DISEASE IN DOGS?

Heart disease in dogs, as in people, can be either present at birth or acquired, often developing during middle age. *Acquired heart disease is more common*, affecting many older dogs.

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HEART DISEASE IN DOGS?

Yes, there are many types of heart disease in dogs. Two of the most common heart diseases in dogs are Degenerative Mitral Valve Disease and Dilated Cardiomyopathy.

### Degenerative mitral valve disease (MYD)

MVD is the most common heart disease in dogs, accounting for approximately **40%** of all heart disease in this species. Eventually, MVD can become severe enough that heart failure occurs.

#### Symptoms of MYD

The first indication of MVD is the presence of a "heart murmur", which can be heard by a veterinarian using a stethoscope. The murmur sound is caused by the turbulent flow of blood jetting backwards through the damaged leaflets of the mitral valve. These murmurs are graded for intensity (loudness) on a scale of 1 to 6. As a general rule, the louder the murmur the more severe the leak.

### Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)

Dilated cardiomyopathy is an acquired disease in which the heart muscle becomes progressively weak. This process likely occurs over a period of several years. DCM also is commonly associated with electrical disturbances of the heart known as cardiac arrhythmias. In its advanced stages, DCM causes heart failure and then death.

#### Symptoms of DCM

The symptoms of DCM often appear suddenly, as if the affected animal has become ill only within the last few days. In reality, the dogs by this time have already progressed through the early stages of the disease and are now in severe heart failure. The symptoms include shortness of breath, abdominal distension, weakness and exercise intolerance. Cardiac arrhythmias may also occur, worsening heart failure and precipitating collapse or sudden death.

### Congenital Heart Defects

Most of these defects cause a cardiac murmur that can be detected by your veterinarian at the time of puppy vaccination. Often dogs with congenital heart defects appear normal when they are young, however most of these defects will eventually cause symptoms, heart failure, or death if they are not treated.

## CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE

Both types of heart disease develop gradually over time and result in the same serious condition called *congestive heart failure* which results from the heart's inability to pump blood at a rate required to meet the body's needs. If left untreated it can be fatal, but thanks to modern veterinary medicine, dogs with heart failure can live longer, healthier, more active lives.

As in human medicine, some veterinarians decide to specialize in certain areas of care, such as cardiology. In some cases, your vet may decide to refer your pet to a specialist for advanced treatment or a second opinion. Don't be afraid to suggest this if your pet is not showing signs of improvement. *Phoenix has two full-time board certified veterinarian cardiologists, Dr. Chris Paige at Animal and Referral Emergency Center of AZ in Mesa (480.898.0111), Dr. Whit Church, at Arizona Veterinary Specialists in Gilbert (480.635.1110).*

## WARNING SIGNS OF HEART FAILURE

While your veterinarian checks your dog's heart regularly, many of the early warning signs of heart failure will be most obvious to you at home. Alert your veterinarian at once if you notice any of the following:

- Coughing (especially at night)
- Lack of energy
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty breathing (even at rest) - May stretch neck up to gulp air