



## Congestive Heart Failure

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) is the most common form of heart disease affecting older dogs. Causes of CHF can be an injury to the heart, a defective valve or simply the aging process. The end result is a heart that works too hard and pumps too little.

The body has an amazing ability to compensate for a failing heart. Responses include an elevated heart rate, constriction of blood vessels, the retention of sodium and increased thirst. At first, all these things are helpful. Over time, however, these responses actually make the heart struggle more and possibly decline faster.

The symptoms of heart failure may include a poor appetite, weight loss, restlessness, coughing, labored breathing and general loss of spirit. The diagnosis of CHF is based on physical exam, lab data, chest x-rays, ECG and in some cases echocardiography (ultrasound). Each pet will be different; therefore the diagnostic approach will be tailored to each pet and family.

Treatment for CHF includes multiple things:

- High quality senior diets
- Weight loss for overweight pets
- Moderate exercise
- Medications

Medications that may be used are:

- Diuretics - curbs sodium retention which in turn relieves edema (water retention)
- Vasodilators - lowers blood pressure, improves heart muscle contractility and oxygen use.
- Anti-arrhythmias - helps control irregular rhythms

The prognosis for a pet with congestive heart failure varies widely. Some will do well for years with minimal medications, while others progress rapidly despite all efforts.

*A note about food.* The average over the counter pet food is 5 times more salty than prescription foods. Treats are even more salty on a per pound basis. There are, however, several diets commercially available as well as home recipes you can make for your pet. It may seem minor, but a low salt diet can really help your pet cope with their disease and live longer.