



Heart Murmur

A heart murmur has been diagnosed in your pet. A heart murmur is not a disease by itself, but an abnormal sound found by the doctor during a physical examination. The sound is caused by turbulence, or an interruption in the normal flow of blood through the heart chambers. There can be many reasons for heart murmurs, so the challenge is to determine why a patient has one.

Some murmurs are considered "normal". For example, very athletic dogs, such as greyhounds, often have murmurs that do not affect them. Many puppies and kittens have "innocent" murmurs that disappear as they grow.

Other murmurs can be a sign of underlying disease. Rarely puppies and kittens can be born with one of several serious congenital heart diseases or "birth defects" that may cause a murmur. However, the most common murmurs are heard in adult pets. Causes can include infection or scarring of the heart valves, an abnormal heart muscle or heartworm disease. Other problems outside of the heart, such as anemia, cancer or hypertension can also cause a murmur.

It is important to determine the cause of a murmur. Tests may include the following:

- Blood tests
- Radiographs (x-rays)
- Echocardiogram (ultrasound of the heart)
- Heartworm test
- Blood pressure
- EKG

Owners at home can help monitor their pet for complications. Counting your pet's respiratory rate (RR) while they are at rest or sleeping can give us an early indication of trouble. Count how many breaths your pet takes in 60 seconds. Do this every day for a week to establish 'normal'. Then once a week to monitor. If your pet's resting RR is more than 30/minute or has shown a consistent increase - your pet should be seen by the veterinarian. Use a calendar to keep track of when you count and the number.

Once we determine why the heart murmur exists, we can decide the best course of treatment. Many options are available to treat heart related problems. Often pets can live a long time with a murmur, and not feel sick, but it is important to follow your veterinarian's recommendations in order to limit complications like congestive heart failure and pneumonia.