

## Heart **Disease** in cats...



A number of factors may contribute to heart and circulatory disease, including old age and obesity. The most common form of heart disease in cats is called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM). Cats with HCM typically develop a massive increase in the thickness of their heart muscle. This impairs heart function and ultimately results in heart failure. Other forms of cardiomyopathy may also occur e.g. causing thinning or only regional thickening of the heart muscle.

### the signs...

- Lethargy.
- Abnormally fast heart rate.
- Heart murmur (caused by turbulent blood flow).
- Rapid and/or difficult breathing.
- Decreased appetite.
- Fainting or collapse.
- Sudden weakness or paralysis of the back legs. This occurs due to the development of a blood clot that blocks the major blood vessels supplying the back legs.

### Many cats show **NO SIGNS** of the disease

Most cat owners will have observed that their cats enjoy a life dedicated to leisure. This low stress life may conceal the development of a heart condition, and as a result many cats with HCM do not show any obvious signs of the disease to their owners.

Often it is not until a veterinary surgeon listens to the chest and hears an abnormality that the heart condition is detected. In some cases there is no abnormality detected by the veterinarian, even when heart disease is present.

Unfortunately, some cats keep their heart disease disguised until the heart is so severely affected that they develop severe weakness of the back legs, severe heart failure with breathing difficulties, or may suddenly die.

### What is the cause?

In most cases, the cause of the heart disease is unknown, although in some cases genetic factors may play a role. Even some very young cats (1-2 years old) can be affected by HCM.

In other cases it occurs as a result of another underlying disease, such as hyperthyroidism, renal disease, or high

blood pressure. Once the other disease is treated the cat's heart disease will also improve.

### How is HCM diagnosed?

First the vet will examine your cat and listen to the heart with a stethoscope. Cats with heart disease will often have a fast heart rate, a heart murmur, or a heart rhythm abnormality.

More tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis, and assess the severity of the condition, and may include:

- Blood tests - to identify if there is an underlying cause of the disease.
- Blood pressure measurement.
- Radiography - X-rays of the chest.
- Electrocardiography (ECG) of the heart - to assess any rhythm abnormalities.

### How is HCM treated?

The tests undertaken will help to establish the severity of an individual cat's heart disease. In many cases no treatment will be needed, but monitoring will continue. In other cases a single medication, or combination of medications may be used. As with most illnesses, early detection and treatment of heart failure can significantly improve your cat's quality of life and life expectancy.

Unfortunately in most cases HCM is a progressive disease that cannot be cured. The good news is that with appropriate treatment, the disease can often be controlled and your cat can go on to lead a happy life.

With modern treatment, the outlook for cats with heart failure is much more optimistic than it once was. Your vet may prescribe medicine to support your cat's diseased heart and slow the progression of the disease.

**If you have any concerns then please discuss them with your veterinary surgeon, we all want to do what is best for your cat.**