

Valvular Disease

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Overview

Valvular heart disease (VHD) is a condition characterized by degeneration and thickening of the heart valves. Valvular heart disease is a very common and progressive disease typically seen in older dogs. Commonly affected breeds include poodles, Yorkshire terriers, schnauzers, cocker spaniels and small mixed-breed dogs. Some breeds, such as Cavalier King Charles spaniels, can be affected early in life.

VHD can cause valve malfunction, which can lead to heart enlargement or heart failure with accumulation of fluid in the lungs or the abdomen. The essential valvular abnormalities are either increased "floppiness" of the mitral valve in the heart, or more often, shortening and thickening of this valve. The degeneration causes the valves to close improperly. Leaking of the valve causes blood to move backwards creating a heart murmur and limiting the amount of blood that can be pumped to the body.

The consequence of moderate to severe valvular heart disease is typically congestive heart failure. The symptoms of heart failure include exercise intolerance, breathing difficulties or coughing and obvious fluid accumulation in the chest cavity or the abdomen.

Diagnosis and Treatment Notes:

- Valvular disease is generally diagnosed by a thorough history, physical examination, chest x-rays, electrocardiogram (EKG) and echocardiogram (heart ultrasound).
- Treatment depends on the severity of the disease, your individual pet, and your veterinarian. Pets with valvular disease may be treated with diuretics (furosemide), angiotension converting enzyme inhibitors (enalapril or benazepril) or digoxin. Those with mild disease may not receive any medications and just put on a salt restricted diet. Discuss treatment details when your pet is diagnosed with this condition.

What to Watch for*:

- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Lethargy
- Exercise intolerance
- Fainting

Please notify us if you notice any of the above signs or if you have any questions!