

Knowing the early signs of heart failure can make a big difference to your dog's life.

It means that you know when to seek medical help for possible heart failure signs, and that your vet can start effective treatment early, when it can achieve the best results.

Understanding heart failure.

Heart failure is a condition that affects the pumping mechanism of the heart. It often results in congestion in the lungs and, hence, can also be referred to as congestive heart failure.

With heart failure, the heart cannot pump blood around the body efficiently, resulting in a reduction in the amount of blood that is pumped out of the heart. Without treatment, the condition gets progressively worse, with dogs feeling more and more unwell and unable to function normally.

The signs and symptoms to look out for:

- Coughing, especially at night
- Reluctance to exercise, with your dog tiring more easily
- Poor appetite
- Laboured or fast breathing
- Fainting – often associated with exercise
- Weight loss
- Enlarged abdomen, due to the accumulation of fluid
- Weakness

If your dog is showing one or more of the above signs, it is important to see your vet without delay for an examination.

Keep your eyes open for changes and keep in touch with your vet.

If your dog is 7 years of age or older, or one of the breeds at increased risk of heart failure (mitral valve disease or dilated cardiomyopathy), be especially watchful for changes in energy and appetite. With your keen eye and your vet's knowledge and experience, heart failure can be an easily-managed condition.

Make sure your dog has regular check-ups and that you use these times to discuss any concerns you have with your vet. This helps ensure that any problems are detected early – when they are much easier to manage.

If you would like to know more about heart failure in dogs, or your dog's risk of developing this condition, your vet will be able to help.

For further information,
you can also visit
healthyheartfordogs.com.au
or
healthyheartfordogs.co.nz
or
contact Boehringer Ingelheim
Australia: 1800 038 037
New Zealand: 0800 802 461

Reference: 1. Atkins C, Bonagura J, Ettinger S, Fox P, Gordon S, Haggstrom J *et al.* Guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of canine chronic valvular heart disease. *J Vet Intern Med* 2009; 23: 1142-1150.



Could you recognise the early signs of heart failure in your dog?

About 1 in 10 dogs seen by vets is suffering from heart disease¹



Boehringer Ingelheim Pty Ltd. ABN 52 000 452 308. Animal Health.
78 Waterloo Rd, North Ryde, NSW 2113. Boehringer Ingelheim (N.Z.)
Limited. Animal Health. Level 1, Unit 9, 42 Ormiston Rd, East Tamaki,
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How is heart failure diagnosed?

In order to make an accurate diagnosis and determine the best treatment, your vet may perform a number of tests:

- Listening to the heart through a stethoscope
- Looking at the heart on an x-ray
- Assessing the rhythm of the heart through an electrocardiogram
- Watching the heart at work on an ultrasound.

What does a diagnosis of heart failure mean?

Today a diagnosis of heart failure should not be a cause for alarm. Recent research has shown that early effective detection and treatment can greatly improve the pumping capacity of the heart, relieving symptoms like tiredness and coughing. Importantly, the research showed that, with effective treatment, a dog with heart failure can enjoy a longer life expectancy.

Are some dogs more at risk of heart failure than others?

Besides older age (over 7) there are some more specific causes of heart failure in certain dogs.

Mitral valve disease is a cause of heart failure most commonly seen in smaller dogs.

In this condition, the heart valve (the mitral valve) becomes thickened and fails to keep an effective seal between the chambers. The leaking of blood can create a sound called a 'murmur' and eventually (but not necessarily) can lead to heart failure.

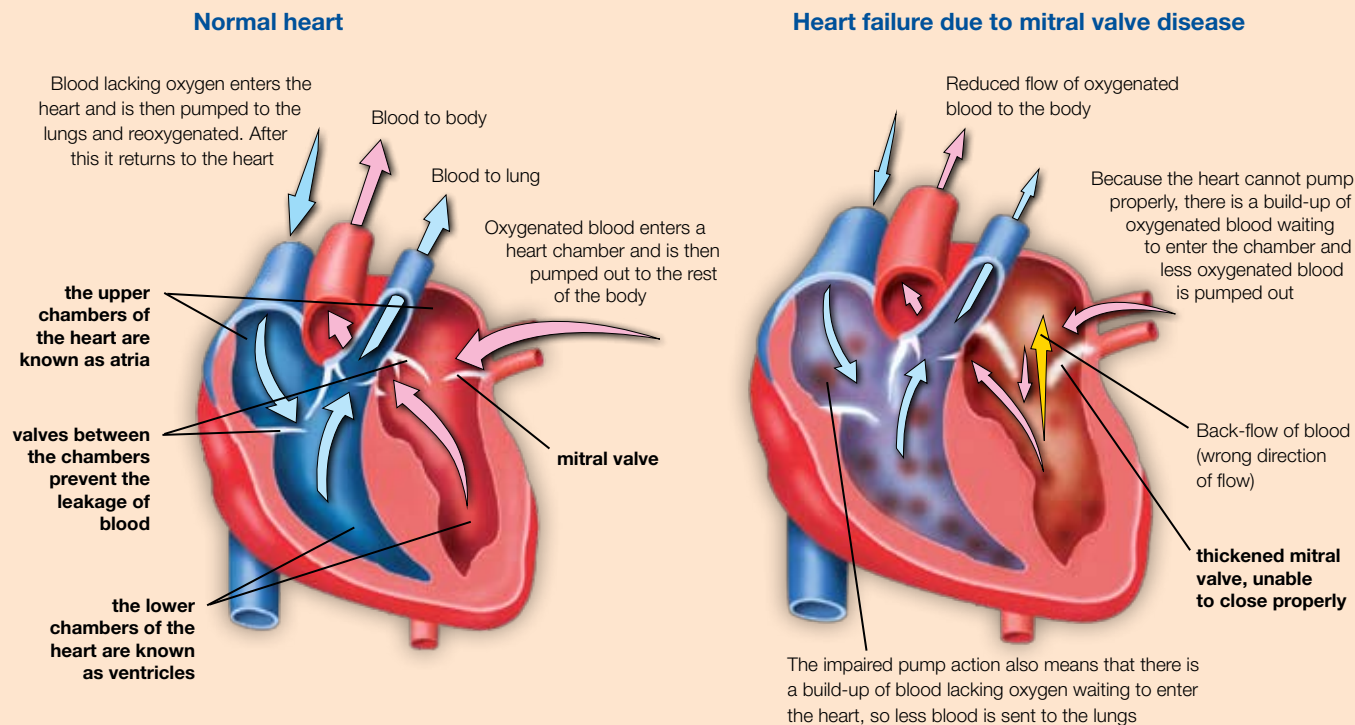
Dogs at risk of mitral valve disease include:

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
Poodle
Schnauzer
Chihuahua
Fox Terrier
Jack Russell Terrier



How the heart fails in heart failure.

The primary function of the heart is to pump blood rich in oxygen around the body and to pump blood needing oxygen to the lungs for reoxygenation. But in heart failure, the pumping mechanism is impaired as you can see in these diagrams:



Dilated cardiomyopathy is a cause of heart failure in larger dogs.

In this condition, the heart muscle becomes too weak to pump efficiently.

Dogs at risk of dilated cardiomyopathy include:

Doberman
Cocker and Springer Spaniel
Boxer
German Shepherd
Great Dane
St Bernard
Irish Wolfhound

