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HEART DISEASE

Your pet had been diagnosed as having heart disease. This brochure is provided to help you learn about heart disease and how to care for your pet at home.

HEART DISEASE

One of the common medical problems in dogs and cats is heart disease. Heart disease is any destructive process within the heart. It does not appear to occur as often in cats.

Your pet's heart is the most important organ in its body. The heart collects blood from the body and pumps this blood to the lungs, where it picks up oxygen. Then, the oxygen rich blood is taken from the lungs back to the heart and the heart pumps it throughout the body.

SIGNS OF HEART DISEASE

Heart disease may cause fluid to accumulate in the lungs or abdomen. Heart disease also results in an inadequate flow of blood to vital organs such as the kidneys, liver, lungs, etc.

Coughing, typically low pitched and sometimes uncontrollable to the point of ending with gagging, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, reduced exercise tolerance, noticeable weight gain or loss and abdominal distention can all be caused by heart disease.

These signs suggest heart disease, but can also be produced by other diseases.

CAUSES

Defects in heart valves and muscle, tumors, trauma, and heartworm infestation can all cause heart disease and lead to heart failure. In dogs, a defective valve in the left side of the heart is often the cause. In cats, a heart muscle defect is the most common heart problem.

In dogs, heart disease is often progressive and may become more serious. It is possible, however, for your dog to recover from some types of heart disease, including heartworm infestation and trauma. With proper management, most dogs with heart disease can live a relatively normal life.

In cats, the occurrence of heart disease is often sudden and requires immediate veterinary care. One of the more recent findings is that a deficiency of taurine in the diet can result in heart disease in the cat. For this reason, it's very important that cats are fed appropriate diets. With proper management, many cats with heart disease can live a relatively normal life.

DIAGNOSIS

Additional tests may be necessary to determine the status of your pet's heart they include x-rays, ECGs, blood pressure, and blood tests.

Many of these laboratory tests will have to be repeated to monitor the effectiveness of treatment.

Your veterinarian may prescribe oral medications for your pet to improve its heart function. Remember to carefully follow the instructions the veterinarian has given you.

Hospitalization may be necessary. In the hospital, the veterinarian will stabilize your pet's condition and attempt to reduce the excess fluid. If heart disease is detected before serious complications develop, a change in diet may be all that is required. As in human heart disease, sodium restriction is necessary.

HOME MANAGEMENT

Once your pet returns home, he will need special attention and care. It is very important that you provide free access to fresh, clean water. Softened water, usually high in sodium, should not be used. Check with your local water department for sodium content of your tap water. If the sodium content is above 150 parts per million, use distilled water. Protect your pet from stress, such as excitement, extreme exertion, high humidity, and hot or cold temperatures. Feed a diet low in sodium and formulated to reduce fluid retention.

DIET RECOMMENDATION

Dietary management is an important part of therapy for all animals with heart disease. The goal of proper diet is to reduce the workload of the heart while supplying the nutritional needs of the pet. Your veterinarian has foods formulated for dietary management of this condition.

FEEDING DIRECTIONS

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new diet over a five to ten day period. Mix the new diet with your pet's former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new diet is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept a new diet, try warming the canned diet to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry diet with warm water (and wait ten minutes before serving). Do not add water to your cat's food, however. Feed only the prescribed diet. Do not feed additional salt or any snacks that may contain sodium. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new diet.