

Feline Aortic Thromboembolism

Feline Aortic Thromboembolism (FATE) is a serious condition that is the result of severe heart disease in cats. As heart disease progresses it can cause the upper heart chamber (left atrium) to enlarge. This enlargement causes disturbances in the blood flow that can lead to formation of blood clots in the atrium. The blood clot can pass into the left ventricle and be pushed out into the aorta. The aorta is the major blood vessel that carries oxygenated blood out to the body and organs. The aorta travels from the heart to the pelvis where it forms a “Y” creating the iliac arteries that supply blood to the hind legs. Clots often lodge at this point, smaller clots may travel into one of the iliac arteries affecting only one hind leg, while larger clots block blood flow to both hind legs, this is called a “Saddle Thrombus”.

Symptoms

- Sudden paralysis of one or both hind legs
- Severe pain/vocalizing
- Weak or nonexistent pulse in affected leg(s)
- Cold hind leg(s)
- Blue nail beds and paw pads in affected leg(s)
- Increases respiratory rate and effort
- Congestive heart failure (CHF)

Diagnosis

An ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram or echo) will allow the cardiologist to assess the heart structure and function. Chest x-rays will show fluid accumulation within or around the lungs. Blood pressure, blood work and Electrocardiogram (ECG) should also be assessed.

Treatment

Treatment includes hospitalization with aggressive medical management and pain control. Anticoagulant medications will also be started to help reduce recurrence of blood clot formation. Many cats with FATE are also in congestive heart failure and medications for heart failure will be started. If only one leg is affected or partially affected the prognosis is better than if both hind legs are affected. Unfortunately, cats with a saddle thrombus usually have a poor prognosis and are at high risk of additional clot formation despite medical management.