

Pulmonary Hypertension

Pulmonary hypertension (PH) is high blood pressure in the arteries leading to the lungs. It is usually a secondary disease, which means the PH is resulting from another disease the pet already has. Diseases that can cause secondary PH include: heartworm, pulmonary thromboembolism (PTE), pulmonary fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, degenerative mitral valve disease or dilated cardiomyopathy. In some instances, it can be the primary disease process. The cause of primary PH is unknown.

Symptoms

Pets with PH can have the following symptoms: lethargy, exercise intolerance, coughing, shortness of breath, cyanosis (blue color tongue and gums), collapse and fainting.

Diagnoses

A cardiac ultrasound (Echocardiogram or echo) will let the cardiologist assess the heart structure and function. Echo color flow Doppler will measure the blood pressure in the lungs and will help the cardiologist determine the severity of the disease. Additional diagnostics will be needed to identify the primary disease that is causing the PH.

Treatment

Pulmonary hypertension can be difficult and frustrating to treat. Medications to treat the primary disease as well as medications to alleviate the symptoms of PH will be prescribed. When PH appears suddenly and seriously, treatment may include several days of hospitalization with oxygen therapy. At home oxygen cages can be used to help provide relief for pets with severe PH.

Prognosis

Prognosis for pets with pulmonary hypertension depends on the severity of the primary disease. One study shows that in dogs who survive the first week of therapy, the probability of survival at 6 months was 84%, and 73% at 1 year. Pulmonary hypertension is a truly debilitating disease, but on occasion it is cured or at least managed well with medications. Many patients die suddenly as a result of PH or are euthanized due to their poor quality of life.