

Points to Remember

**Cardiomyopathy can occur in quite young cats as idiopathic disease.*

**Often the cats alter their activity level to fit with what they can cope with and this disguises the symptoms for some time.*

**Some cardiomyopathy cases may be resolved if the originating cause is treated soon enough.*

**Medication becomes essential to maintain quality and length of life.*

**This is a terminal disease process for most cats. The average lifespan once diagnosed may be weeks through to several years with appropriate medication.*

**If you have any concerns about your cat, see your vet now.*

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cardiomyopathy in cats

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Cardiomyopathy in Cats Information

Cardiomyopathy is a term used to describe diseases of the heart muscles. In cats, at least three classes of cardiomyopathy have been described. In all cases the heart disease may result in clinical signs of heart failure. Cardiomyopathy may be a primary condition, or secondary to another disease process.

Causes: There are many causes of cardiomyopathy, however, in older cats thyroid disease (hyperthyroidism) may cause a type of cardiomyopathy. Other causes include a dietary deficiency of Taurine, an essential nutrient. This is not seen in cats fed commercial cat food or fresh meat. Often, no cause of the cardiomyopathy is found.

Clinical Signs: In the early stages of the disease, the cat may cope and show no signs of the disease. This situation is referred to as compensated heart disease. Often cats will alter their activity levels to those they can cope with and so the disease may be quite advanced before it is diagnosed.

The major long term concerns with cardiomyopathy are:

1) Development of Congestive Heart Failure. Breathlessness and lethargy are the most frequently noticed signs of congestive heart failure (CHF) and these result from a failure of the heart to efficiently pump blood. Blood backs up into the blood vessels of the lungs causing fluid to accumulate in lung tissue (pulmonary oedema)

2) Thromboembolic Disease; altered blood flow in enlarged heart chambers predisposes to the formation of blood clots within the chambers of the heart. This clot becomes organized and is called a thrombus. Parts of the thrombus may break off and travel in the blood stream until they become lodged in a smaller vessel. One of the most common places for the thrombus to lodge is where the aorta branches into the main blood vessels that supply the hindlegs. This obstruction of the iliac arteries leads to paralysis or paresis of the hindlegs, usually both legs but occasionally only one leg is involved. The legs feel cold to touch because they have no blood supply. Although a minority of cats may recover completely with intensive treatment, this is a potentially fatal complication of cardiomyopathy.

Diagnosis: of heart diseases can be suspected on the basis of clinical signs and is usually confirmed by chest x rays and/ or ultrasound. Ultrasound examination is the best method of distinguishing between the types of cardiomyopathy.

ECG's give little information on heart conduction and size but may be useful in looking for concurrent arrhythmias, ectopic heart beats and murmurs. Sometimes it is necessary to undergo specific tests such as blood tests to search for possible underlying disease.

Treatment: In cases where an underlying disease is diagnosed, specific treatment of this problem

may lead to resolution of the heart disease. Hyperthyroidism is the most treatable cause of cardiomyopathy since complete resolution of the heart condition is possible if treated early. In cases where no cause is isolated, and cases where heart failure remains after treatment of the cause then medication may be needed to prolong quality and length of life.

Treatment varies according to each individual case, but may include:

- 1) Diuretics if congestive heart failure with pulmonary oedema or ascites is present.
- 2) Beta blocker drugs to reduce heart rate when it is excessive
- 3) Calcium channel blockers to help the heart muscle relax and so achieve more effective filling of the heart. This is often the drug of choice and sometimes the only one required long term.
- 4) Aspirin may be given to reduce the possibility of thrombus formation. As aspirin may be toxic to cats, this is only given with veterinary advice and monitoring of treatment.
- 5) ACE inhibitors— these drugs help control congestive heart failure. The long term outlook for a cat with cardiomyopathy is extremely variable depending on the cause of the disease. Cats with this disease may remain stable for several years, and live relatively normal lives.

Cats with cardiomyopathy do not require a special diet, although salty food such as cat treats and dry food may be best avoided as it promotes water retention. Sometimes a low salt diet is recommended, although palatability can be a problem with these diets.