



Chronic Valvular Heart Disease

By: Dr. John Bonagura

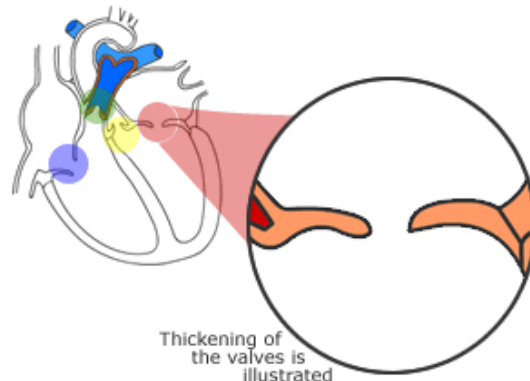
Valvular heart disease (VHD) is a condition characterized by degeneration and thickening of the heart valves. Valvular heart disease is a progressive disease more common in dogs than in cats, and represents the most important of adult canine heart diseases.

Valvular heart disease is a progressive disease that is common in older dogs. Commonly affected dogs include Poodles, Yorkshire Terriers, Schnauzers, Cocker Spaniels and small mixed-breeds. Some breeds, such as Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, can be affected early in life.

VHD can affect a dog/cat causing valve malfunction, which can lead to heart enlargement or heart failure with accumulation of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema) or the abdomen (ascites).

What to Watch For:

- Coughing
- Difficulty Breathing
- Exercise Intolerance
- Fainting



The valves of the heart affected by Chronic Valvular Disease are marked with colored circles.

Diagram from www.heartdog.co.uk

Diagnosis:

Veterinary care should include diagnostic tests and subsequent treatment recommendations. Diagnostic tests are needed to recognize VHD, and exclude other diseases, including:

- Complete medical history and physical examination including auscultation (listening with a stethoscope).
- Chest X-rays.
- An electrocardiogram (EKG), which is a record of the heart's electrical action
- An echocardiogram (ultrasound) can confirm the diagnosis

Treatment:

Treatments for VHD may include one or more of the following:

- Diuretics such as furosemide (Lasix)
- Angiotensin inhibitors such as enalapril (Enacard) or benazepril
- Positive inotropic drugs (increase contractions of cardiac muscles) such as digoxin (lanoxin)
- Sodium (salt) restricted diet

NOTE: Treatment or therapy is not consistently prescribed for mildly-affected dogs and cats.

Home Care and Prevention:

- Administer any prescribed medications and observe your pet's general activity level, appetite, and interest. Watch your dog/cat for labored breathing, cough, or intolerance. If possible, learn to take a respiratory (breathing) rate when your pet is resting (ask our vet about this).
- VHD is often a progressive disease and cannot be prevented. Regular veterinary examinations that include examination of the heart with a stethoscope can identify it in its earliest stages.