



# *10 SIGNS OF HEART DISEASE IN CATS*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Heart disease in cats presents itself in much the same way as in dogs, with a few exceptions. The biggest difference is that cats tend to mask their signs better than dogs, and therefore go longer without detection.*

## 10 Signs of Heart Disease in Cats<sup>1</sup>

Heart disease in cats presents itself in much the same way as in **dogs**, with a few exceptions. The biggest difference is that cats tend to mask their signs better than dogs, and therefore go longer without detection. Since early detection is key, be on the look-out for the following signs...

### Vomiting

While coughing is a major symptom of heart disease in dogs, it does not often occur in cats. Cats, however, do vomit as a result of heart disease, where dogs do not.

### Difficulty Breathing

If your cat's breathing becomes labored, or if it experiences shortness of breath or begins to breathe more rapidly than usual, it may be a sign of heart disease.

### Blood Clots

Blood clots (thromboembolisms) are often a result of heart disease in cats - and often the first sign that is noticed. Symptoms are pain and the inability to walk normally on the hind legs. The femoral pulse may be weak or absent in one or both hind legs.

### Depressed/Withdrawn

If your cat begins to exhibit changes in behavior like acting depressed, withdrawn, reluctance to accept affection, or isolating itself, the behavior may be caused by heart disease.

### Poor Appetite

A cat will not suddenly lose its appetite for no good reason. There will almost always be a larger cause behind a poor appetite. Be aware of other signs as well and seek veterinary assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> November 2015. Top Ten Signs of Heart Disease in Cats. Retrieved from URL:

[http://www.petmd.com/cat/slideshows/general\\_health/top-ten-signs-of-heart-disease-in-cats](http://www.petmd.com/cat/slideshows/general_health/top-ten-signs-of-heart-disease-in-cats)

### *Weight Loss or Gain*

*Weight loss is definitely a symptom of heart disease, though weight gain can be, as well.*

### *Swollen Abdomen*

*More likely than weight gain is a bloated or distended abdomen.*

### *Fainting/Collapsing*

*If you find your cat has **fainted** or collapsed, seek veterinary help. If your cat is experience any of these other signs, it may all be due to heart disease.*

### *Weakness*

*Sure, cats nap a lot no matter the circumstance. However, if your cat appears less playful or tires more easily due to weakness rather than laziness, you may have a problem.*

### *Restlessness*

*Restlessness is harder to recognize in cats than in dogs, as it seems many healthy cats are restless, especially at night. If your cat suddenly becomes restless at night where it wasn't before, be on the look-out for other signs of heart disease.*

### *Recommendation – Annual Veterinary Examination*

*The best thing that you as a cat owner can do is to take your cat to a veterinarian at least once per year so he/she can pay close attention to its heart. While examination with a stethoscope cannot detect all feline heart diseases, it's probably the most cost-effective approach to a diagnosis, in otherwise healthy cat.*

### *Causes of Heart Disease<sup>2</sup>*

#### *Congenital Defects*

*Congenital defects are those present at birth. John Bonagura, DVM, professor of veterinary clinical sciences at Ohio State University states that congenital feline cardiac disease is relatively rare, occurring in only an estimated one to two percent of kittens.*

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from URL: [http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health\\_Information/HeartDisease.cfm](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/HeartDisease.cfm)

## Acquired Disorders

*Cardiomyopathy: While occasionally observed in kittens, cardiomyopathy is almost always an acquired condition and is by far the most common among all adult feline heart disorders, accounting for almost two-thirds of heart conditions diagnosed in cats.*

*Cardiomyopathy is brought about by a structural abnormality in the muscle enclosing one or both ventricles, with the affected chamber taking on a thickened, dilated or scarred appearance. (The left ventricle is always affected; right-chamber involvement may also occur, but only rarely.) The abnormality sets the organ's blood-collecting and blood-pumping mechanics awry, and such dysfunction can progress to congestive heart failure — and a resulting collection of fluid in or around the [lungs](#)— and then to respiratory distress.*

- *Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, according to Dr. Bonagura, is diagnosed in 85 percent to 90 percent of primary cardiomyopathy cases. Developing with no explanation other than the strong likelihood of hereditary influence, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is characterized by a thickening of the muscle tissue associated with the left ventricle.*
- *Restrictive cardiomyopathy, which accounts for approximately 10 percent of the primary heart muscle diseases diagnosed in Dr. Bonagura's practice, is caused by the excessive buildup of scar tissue on the inner lining and muscle of a ventricle. This prevents the organ from relaxing completely, filling adequately and emptying with each heartbeat. Most often affecting [geriatric cats](#), this disorder is also characterized by severely enlarged atria and reduced cardiac filling and pumping efficiency.*
- *Dilated cardiomyopathy, the third type of the disease, is comparatively rare, says Dr. Bonagura, probably accounting for only one percent or two percent of primary cardiomyopathy cases. It is characterized by an enlarged and poorly contracting left ventricle. The heart walls are thin and flaccid, which results in weak pumping and a reduced forward flow of blood from the heart.*

## Two Major Signs

*According to Dr. Bonagura, there are two alarming signs that a cat may be suffering from advanced cardiomyopathy. "The animal can't breathe or it can't walk," he says. "If it is struggling to take in air or if it can't move its rear legs, you should seek veterinary help right away."*

*Although most frequently affecting male cats, cardiomyopathy often claims the lives of females as well. While primarily occurring in [older animals](#), the disease can also occur in kittens. And though genetic predisposition puts some breeds — Persians, Ragdolls and Maine Coons, for example — at elevated risk, no breed is immune to its threat.*