About the Cardiac Education Group (CEG)

The Cardiac Education Group is a group of board-certified veterinary cardiologists from both academia and private practice that offers independent recommendations for the evaluation and treatment of canine heart disease. The group is committed to providing resources and information on the diagnosis, treatment and management of heart disease and heart failure in dogs in order to promote detection and diagnosis with greater accuracy and confidence.

The CEG Mission

The CEG offers educational recommendations and resources that will help veterinarians diagnose, treat and manage heart disease and heart failure in dogs, improving the lives of dogs with heart disease.

The CEG promotes and facilitates:

• Educational activities to increase veterinarians’ skills and confidence in diagnosing, treating and managing heart disease and heart failure.

• Tools and resources to help veterinarians detect and diagnose heart disease earlier and with greater accuracy.

• Recommendations to ensure dogs with heart failure receive optimal care and treatments to promote longevity and quality of life.

• On-line resources for veterinarians.

• Collaboration among pet owners and veterinarians pertaining to canine heart health.

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Initial Treatment of Life Threatening Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

Initial treatment of acute CHF should include injectable furosemide, oxygen and butorphanol sedation if needed. Administer pimobendan if the patient can tolerate oral medication. These patients require 24-hour care and may benefit from specialty referral. Stabilize the patient before transport is considered.

Complicating Airway Disease

The presence of some respiratory conditions may complicate classification of dogs with heart disease. This is especially problematic in distinguishing class B2 from class C dogs. Collapsing trachea, mainstem bronchial compression due to left atrial enlargement, chronic bronchitis or pulmonary hypertension may cause symptoms similar to those of congestive heart failure. These include coughing, tachypnea or symptoms related to airway obstruction. These patients may require additional diagnostic testing and/or therapeutic trials. See www.CardiacEducationGroup.org for additional details.

Canine CardiaC diaGnOSTiC SCHeMe

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A

**Dogs with no structural disease but high risk for developing heart disease**

B

**Dogs with past or current clinical signs of heart failure**

D

**Dogs with structural heart disease that have not yet developed clinical signs of heart failure**

B1: No cardiac enlargement  
B2: Cardiac enlargement is present

**Dogs with end-stage disease with clinical signs of heart failure refractory to standard therapy**

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**KEY:** Red text : ESSENTIAL diagnostic procedures  
Black text : Diagnostic procedures to consider
- Yearly auscultation
- Screening programs for selected dogs
- Patient history
- Cardiac and pulmonary auscultation
- Thoracic radiographs
  - Blood pressure
  - Electrocardiogram (ECG) when cardiac arrhythmia is evident during clinical examination
  - NT-proBNP
  - Echocardiography for definitive diagnosis of underlying structural heart disease
  - 24 hour ambulatory (Holter) electrocardiogram (ECG) for evaluation of heart rhythm disturbances
  - Ambulatory event monitor electrocardiogram (ECG) for evaluation of syncope
  - Clinical lab tests: serum biochemistries, PCV/TS (or CBC) and urinalysis (prior to initiating any therapy)
- No specific dietary changes or exercise restrictions at this stage
- Manage systemic hypertension if present

B1: MMVD* – No treatment

DCM* – Since optimal therapy is uncertain, consulting a cardiologist may be useful in these patients

B2: MMVD – ACEi* in patients with severe cardiac enlargement

DCM – ACEi in patients with confirmed cases and consult a cardiologist regarding use
  - of Beta blockers or other treatments
• **Patient history**
• **Cardiac and pulmonary auscultation**
• **Thoracic radiographs**
• Blood pressure
• Electrocardiogram (ECG) when cardiac arrhythmia is evident during clinical examination
• NT-proBNP
• Echocardiography for definitive diagnosis of underlying structural heart disease
• 24 hour ambulatory (Holter) electrocardiogram (ECG) for evaluation of heart rhythm disturbances
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• No treatment
• Client education
• Annual re-evaluation

**Standard Treatment: Furosemide, Pimobendan, ACEi**
• Spironolactone is commonly added to long-term therapy
• Atrial fibrillation – digoxin and/or diltiazem
• Ventricular arrhythmias – lidocaine for emergency therapy of ventricular tachycardia
• Consider dietary changes: avoid excessive sodium intake and maintain adequate protein intake
• Exercise as tolerated, avoid prolonged strenuous activity

**Standard Treatment: Furosemide, Pimobendan, ACEi & Spironolactone**
• Digoxin if not contraindicated
• Atrial fibrillation – digoxin and/or diltiazem
• Ventricular arrhythmias – lidocaine for emergency therapy of ventricular tachycardia
• Other therapies may be helpful but consultation with a cardiologist is strongly recommended
• Dietary changes: avoid excessive sodium intake and maintain adequate protein and caloric intake
• Exercise as tolerated, avoid prolonged strenuous activity

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