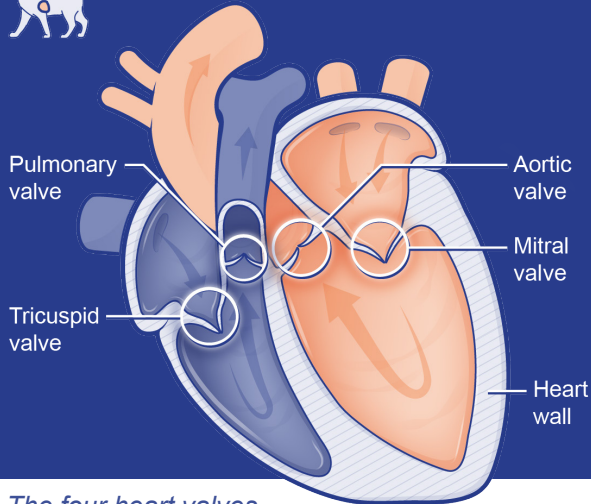


Heart health and your cat

HEART MURMURS IN CATS



The four heart valves

Your vet has detected a heart murmur. Often learning that your pet has a heart murmur may come as a surprise, and understandably you may be extremely worried about it. A heart murmur is not always a reason for concern – but it is important to find out what is causing the murmur.

1. What is a heart murmur?

A heart murmur is a 'whooshing' sound heard when your pet's heart beats. **Your vet will typically detect a heart murmur by listening with a stethoscope.**



Heart murmurs can develop at any age; some pets are born with a heart murmur and others will only develop one later in life.

As pets with heart disease only show symptoms when the condition is quite advanced, very often when your vet detects a heart murmur in your pet, they may seem completely normal to you.

Most heart murmurs in cats are caused by underlying heart disease, typically: thickened heart muscle causing narrowing in the heart chambers which makes the blood flow faster as it is pumped out of the heart; leaky heart valves which do not

close properly and therefore allow back-flow of blood in the wrong direction; or sometimes heart abnormalities that your pet may have been born with such as a small hole in the heart or an abnormal blood vessel.

Occasionally, in some very young kittens, an 'innocent flow murmur' can be present, which is not due to underlying heart disease. These murmurs are very soft and tend to disappear by the time they are six months old. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that **in a kitten, if the murmur is loud or if the murmur does not go away by the age of 6 months,** the heart murmur is more likely to be due to actual heart disease.

Lastly, some pets will develop a heart murmur if they are generally unwell, because of conditions completely unrelated to the heart, for example if they have a fever or an anaemia (low number of red blood cells).

2. How is a diagnosis made?

The only way to confirm the exact cause of a murmur is with **echocardiography** (an ultrasound scan of the heart), where the heart chambers and valves can be assessed in detail and measured. This will reveal if there is heart disease present, the significance of the heart disease and it will allow your vet to decide if any treatment is required.

Your vet may recommend a blood test to measure proBNP (a marker of heart disease). If the proBNP test is abnormal, heart disease is likely and **echocardiography is strongly recommended.** If the proBNP test is normal, severe heart disease is less likely, however a mild form may still be present. →

How can VVS help?

During a Virtual Veterinary Specialists (VVS) heart work-up your pet's heart is scanned by your vet together with an experienced VVS Cardiology Specialist. Your vet will let you know about any findings from the heart ultrasound and ECG. Your vet will explain the diagnosis and recommended treatment options, and talk you through your pet's prognosis, as well as any other tests, for example blood tests, that may be required. Your vet will also receive a full written report from the VVS Cardiology Specialist within a few days.

Your own vet will remain completely involved in your pet's care by working alongside a VVS Cardiology Specialist, and there is no need to travel to a referral centre, your pet is seen at your normal practice in familiar surroundings.

Learn more here



www.vvs.vet

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→ If heart disease is suspected by your vet, **echocardiography is always the most reliable test.**

Once a heart murmur is detected, an **early diagnosis is extremely important** as the correct treatment started at the right time can delay (and in some cases prevent) the progression of heart disease and the development of symptoms.

3. How is a heart ultrasound performed?

A heart ultrasound is a **completely painless procedure**; some pets even fall asleep during it!



Your pet will need to lie on their side and remain still for the scan, so a mild sedation can be given to help them relax. This sedation is especially chosen to be suitable for pets with heart disease.

The fur on both sides of your pet's chest needs to be clipped and some gel is applied to the skin so that the ultrasound image is clear. The whole procedure usually takes up to 60 minutes and your pet will be closely monitored throughout, including monitoring their heart rate and rhythm with an ECG. ■



Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the most common type of heart disease in cats. It causes the heart muscle to become thickened. This can result in a heart murmur because the thickened muscle causes narrowing in the heart chambers which makes the blood flow faster as it is pumped out of the heart.

See separate HCM handout for more information

