

## Tips for living with a dog with a heart condition



**Your dog has been diagnosed to have a heart condition: treatment includes medication and lifestyle changes to both prolong your pet's life and ensure a good quality of life.**

**F**irst, your dog should avoid intense physical effort. Like humans, when a dog starts running or walking briskly, the heart beats faster and stronger in the chest. The muscles need more energy and oxygen, so the pumping action of the heart is increased to send out more blood. A diseased heart is less able to adapt to this increased demand for blood supply.

This is why the level of exercise taken by your dog should generally be restricted, and importantly, it should be adapted to the severity of the condition.



**H**owever, our recommendation is to maintain a regular routine of physical activity. The heart is a muscle that needs a workout to stay fit. Quiet walks are ideal, preferably on a regular route so that you can easily notice any change in your dog's fitness.

Second, avoid salty food. Salt favours water retention, which can lead to pulmonary oedema. Depending on the course of the disease, your pet may even be prescribed a special low-salt food. The summer season with its snacks and barbecues is a bad time for salt-free diets. Keep an eye on your dog, who could easily run off with sausages and peanuts, or politely beg small treats from your guests.

Thirdly, watch the weight!

Being overweight is dangerous for heart patients. It risks overworking the heart in two respects: the heart has to work harder to move the additional body mass, and fatty deposits around the heart hinder its action, making your dog tire more quickly.

It is essential to monitor your dog's weight and maintain it at a healthy level. We can help you to set a target weight. Prescription diets specially designed for dogs with heart problems may be suggested; these foods are salt-restricted and enriched with essential fatty acids. Any change of diet should be gradual in order to avoid problems with the new food. It's better to introduce a new diet after the medical treatment has been started. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

On the other hand, significant weight loss is a warning sign. It should be noted that this can be caused by a worsening of the heart disease, usually beginning with a phase of anorexia (poor appetite) and muscle loss. In any case, any variations in weight should be discussed with our clinic staff.

Of course, from time to time you might want to make a little exception to the daily diet. But always be careful not to give too much fat, or too many salty treats.

Lastly, protect your dog from heat and stress. Peak risk times for the heart occur when it is suddenly overloaded: stress, excitement (playing with children or other dogs) and vigorous exercise. Of course, the level of risk will depend on your pet's sensitivity; every dog reacts differently to excitement.

Always walk your dog on a lead and avoid hot times of day.

Most of the time, your pet will know when to stop and get some rest (however, some breeds such as poodles never know when to stop). Simply listen to your dog and don't push it.