

Heart disease affects felines of any age. The disease can be easily managed with diet and medication over the lifetime of your cat, however early detection is essential. Oftentimes, cats develop heart disease over a period of time, but symptoms may not appear until later stages. So it's important to recognize the warning signs.

Your cat may have heart disease if he/she:

- Has inexplicable weight loss / loss of appetite
- Appears weak and / or listless
- Shows lack of interest in or is intolerant of exercise
- Has shortness of breath / difficulty breathing
- Has a low-pitched, uncontrollable cough
- Has a distended belly caused by fluid buildup in the lungs and abdomen

American Short & Long Hairs, Bengals, Maine Coons, Norwegian Forest cats, orange mixed breed & purebreds, Persians, Ragdolls and Sphynx are all prone to heart disease. **See which CAT BREEDS are more prone to heart disease and other serious health conditions.**



Veterinary cardiologist Dr. Bill Brown (left) checks a patient's heart health. Veterinary nurse Tabitha Owens assists.

See your veterinarian immediately

If you spot any of these symptoms see your veterinarian immediately. Many of these symptoms can also be caused by other illnesses and conditions.

The sooner heart disease is identified and treated, the better the prognosis for your cat.

Diagnosing feline heart disease starts with a thorough physical exam and blood test. Blood work will identify any abnormalities including if your cat has an overactive thyroid which is one of the causes of feline heart disease. Other diagnostics may include: X-rays to spot structural abnormalities in your cat's heart or the presence of fluid around his/her lungs, and an echocardiogram, to help your veterinarian confirm possible heart disease and to determine the origin of any heart murmurs that may be heard during the physical exam.

Causes include heartworm and diet

There are many possible causes of feline heart disease.

These include:

- Heartworm. ([See more on heartworm and other parasites.](#))
- Hyperthyroidism. ([See more on thyroid disease.](#))
- Deficiency of an essential amino acid called taurine. (Commercial brands of cat food now contain taurine supplements.)
- Tumors and trauma.
- Heredity and birth defects.

HEART MURMURS

Heart murmurs can be a sign of heart disease. The origin of a heart murmur in your cat can only be detected through an echocardiogram. NOT all murmurs indicate heart disease; some can be due to short-term stress.