



## **PERICARDIAL EFFUSION IN DOGS**

Pericardial effusion is fluid around the heart within the pericardial sac. As this fluid accumulates it constricts the heart leading to inadequate heart function and altered blood flow to the body. This can result in vomiting, weakness, collapse, increased breathing, and death. The most common causes of this condition are cancer (hemangiosarcoma which generally forms a mass off the right atrium; a heart base tumor, idiopathic (meaning no cause is identified), or a coagulopathy (inability to clot blood, possibly due to rodenticide ingestion).

Unfortunately, cancer is one of the most common causes of this condition. We generally recommend full blood work and echocardiogram (ultrasound study of the heart) to better characterize the cause of the fluid accumulation in your pet. We can also perform cytology on the fluid to look for cancer cells.

If present, the most common cause is a cancer called hemangiosarcoma - a blood vessel tumor that most commonly affects the heart, liver and spleen. This cancer can form off of the right atrium of the heart, and can also be present in the lungs, liver, spleen. Hemangiosarcoma is quite aggressive, and spreads rapidly to other locations despite our interventions. Generally, at the time of diagnosis, there has already been microscopic spread to other organs and once confirmed via biopsy, chemotherapy an option, but does not always improve survival time much. If additional interventions or therapies are to be considered, an ultrasound of the abdomen is also recommended to evaluate these organs.

In order to stabilize your pet, treatment involves placing a needle into this space allowing us to remove the fluid and enabling the heart to pump efficiently again. Once resolving the pericardial effusion, most dogs will show dramatic improvement in a very short time. What cannot not be known is when the fluid will come back. The average survival in dogs with pericardial effusion from cancer is only weeks to 2-3 months at best.