

MEDIA RELEASE

The Australian Veterinary Association



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Vets urge owners to look out for signs of heart disease in dogs

With advances in animal health, dogs are living longer, and health conditions such as congestive heart failure are being seen more often by vets.

Dr David Neck from The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) said that if congestive heart failure is caught early there are a range of treatments available that can slow the progression of the disease so that your dog can live longer and enjoy a better quality of life.

“Owners often fail to recognise and report the signs of congestive heart failure to their vets because they commonly dismiss behaviours like slowing down as normal ageing changes.

“The condition can affect a significant proportion of older dogs, particularly of certain breeds and these behavioural changes are often signs of an underlying condition. Even subtle changes in behaviour are a reason to contact your vet because these are the first signs of illness,” Dr Neck said.

The top ten signs of congestive heart failure for dog owners to look out for include:

- Coughing – minor coughs tend to last a few days. If after this time your dog is still coughing, seek veterinary advice.
- Difficulty breathing – including shortness of breath, laboured or rapid breathing.
- Changes in behaviour – such as tiring more easily, being less playful, reluctance to exercise or accept affection, being withdrawn.
- Poor appetite – especially if combined with other symptoms on this list.
- Weight loss or gain – while weight loss is more common some dogs with heart disease develop a bloated abdomen.
- Fainting – seek veterinary help immediately if your dog collapses or faints, as it could be a sign of one of several serious illnesses, including heart disease.
- Weakness – while this comes with old age, if it is combined with other symptoms there could be something else going on.
- Restlessness – particularly at night.
- Oedema – swelling of the body tissues particularly in the abdomen and other

extremities.

- Isolation – distancing itself from you and other pets.

The AVA recommends annual health checks for pets and twice a year checks for dogs over the age of 11 (depending on the breed).

“As in all diseases, the earlier it’s detected and you start treatment, the better the outcome. Often a vet can detect disease just by listening to the heart, well before any symptoms become evident. Your vet can discuss the best care options for your furry friend.”

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national professional association of veterinary surgeons in Australia. Founded in 1921, the AVA today represents 7000 members working in all areas of animal science, health and welfare.