



## SADDLE THROMBUS

### ABOUT THE DISEASE

**Saddle thrombus** (descending aortic thromboembolism) is a disease that solely affects cats and occurs when blood clots restrict or completely obstruct blood flow to the hind limbs. On rare occasions, it will also affect a front limb.

The disease subtly starts as a thickening of the heart muscle called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which causes small blood clots to form and travel throughout the body. Please see the document on [Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy](#) for additional information.

Once a **saddle thrombus** abruptly manifests, it produces immediate and severe pain of the hind limbs that quickly progresses to paralysis. The muscles of the hind limbs become hard, the footpads become bluish in hue, and patients often develop congestive heart failure. Please see the document on [Congestive Heart Failure](#) for additional information.

### OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A physical examination by a veterinarian and the patient's clinical history are often the only ways to diagnose a saddle thrombus.

Please see the documents for [Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy](#) and [Congestive Heart Failure](#) for a more in-depth discussion of diagnostics for heart disease. No direct diagnostic can confirm the exact location of the patient's blood clot.

Complete blood work and urine testing will provide overall health status to help determine which medications will be appropriate.

### TREATMENT

Early detection of heart disease on annual physical examinations can allow early treatment with anti-clotting medications.

Unfortunately, once paralysis develops there is no specific treatment that will allow the cat to regain mobility. Treatment is mainly supportive care, although euthanasia is generally recommended.

Some patients with more mild symptoms are placed on intravenous (IV) fluids to increase blood flow (perfusion) to the back legs and higher dose pain medications. Heart medications are often used based on concurrent hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and congestive heart failure.

All patients are placed on anti-clotting medications to reduce potential of new blood clot formation. Unfortunately, there are no reliable medications to break down the existing blood clot(s).

Please see the documents for [Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy](#) and [Congestive Heart Failure](#) for more information.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Once a **saddle thrombus** manifests, it is already in an advanced stage.
  - Patients with hind limb paralysis are most often euthanized.
- Early detection of heart disease will allow some patients to be placed on anti-clotting medications.
  - Medications can only help prevent the formation of new clots but cannot break down current clots.