



DILATED CARDIOMYOPATHY

ABOUT THE DISEASE

The heart is made of specialized muscle cells which contract to circulate the blood throughout the entire body. **Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)** is a failing ability of the heart muscles to contract appropriately, which leads to gradual dilation or enlargement of the heart chambers. DCM is the most common disease of heart muscle in dogs.

DCM is usually the result of genetics, with Doberman Pinschers, Irish Wolfhounds, Great Danes, and Boxers being some of the predisposed breeds. In rare circumstances, DCM can also be associated with some infectious diseases, certain toxicoses, and nutritional deficiencies. Recent studies have also identified an association between the development of DCM and feeding a grain-free, legume-rich diet.

DCM is an irreversible and progressive disease, meaning patients early in the disease process may be asymptomatic. Later in the course of disease, patients can progress to congestive heart failure and develop signs including labored breathing, coughing, lethargy, exercise intolerance, weakness, collapse, and/or sudden death.

Please see the [Congestive Heart Failure](#) document for additional information.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Chest X-rays (thoracic radiographs) will show the size of the heart and any signs of congestive heart failure.

An ECG (electrocardiogram) may show an abnormal/irregular heart rhythm (arrhythmia), which can occur secondary to the stretching of the heart muscle.

An ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) is the best method for diagnosing and assessing the severity of DCM.

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

TREATMENT

In addition to the medications outlined in the [Congestive Heart Failure](#) document, DCM patients may also receive:

- Antiarrhythmic medications – help control abnormal heart rhythms. The choice of medication will be dependent on the type of arrhythmia.
 - Lidocaine, mexiletine, procainamide
 - Diltiazem, Cardiac Glycosides (i.e., Digoxin)

In severe cases, patients may require hospitalization to address congestive heart failure and arrhythmias.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Consider early and regular screening/monitoring for DCM in predisposed breeds.
- If the patient is being fed a grain-free, legume-rich diet, consider switching to a grain-inclusive diet.
- Seek immediate consultation if the patient develops respiratory distress, collapses, or loses consciousness.
- Please reference the [Congestive Heart Failure](#) document for additional information.