



MITRAL VALVE DISEASE

ABOUT THE DISEASE

The mitral valve is a one-way valve that separates the upper and lower chambers on the left side of the heart. When functioning properly, this valve prevents blood from flowing backward through the heart into the lungs when the heart beats.

Mitral valve disease (aka Myxomatous mitral valve disease, degenerative mitral valve disease) happens when this valve thickens/deforms and is no longer effective at preventing backward flow of blood.

Mitral valve disease is the most common cardiac disease of dogs. It primarily affects small breed dogs (Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, terriers, dachshunds, chihuahuas, etc.), can sometimes occur in larger dogs, and is rare in cats.

Mitral valve disease is a progressive condition. Many patients, regardless of stage of disease, will have an audible heart murmur. Patients in the early stages of MVD may be asymptomatic or only demonstrate a nonproductive cough. As the disease progresses, patients can develop congestive heart failure.

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

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Mitral valve disease is usually first diagnosed by the detection of a heart murmur during a routine health examination.

An ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) is the preferred choice for confirmation of diagnosis and assessment of severity.

X-rays (radiographs) can detect heart enlargement but will not determine the severity of valve dysfunction.

An enzymatic test (proBNP) may help confirm the presence of heart disease but will not necessarily determine severity.

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

TREATMENT

Unfortunately, there is no cure for **mitral valve disease**, which means the goal is to manage the clinical signs, reduce secondary side effects of the disease, and attempt to reduce the time of onset of CHF.

Patients in early stages of the disease may not need any treatment.

Patients in later stages of the disease may be started on dietary (high protein, low sodium) and medical therapy.

Mitral valve disease patients may receive:

- [Pimobendan](#) – improves contractility of the heart muscle, opens the blood vessels to help blood flow
- [ACE Inhibitors](#) – (enalapril, benazepril) helps the kidneys get rid of excess water, reduces blood pressure to allow the heart to pump more effectively

Once patients with MVD progress to CHF, therapy is aimed at reducing fluid accumulation and minimizing associated clinical signs. Please see the [Congestive Heart Failure](#) document for common medications used for CHF.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Lower-intensity, on-leash walks are best as long as the patient does not show signs of exhaustion or difficulty.
- Early detection and long-term monitoring will maximize the ability to manage symptoms once they develop.
- Monitoring resting/sleeping respiratory rates at home can be an easy way to monitor for progression of disease.