



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.

Underlying heart disease is the main source of blood clot formation, and often with feline patients a thickening of the heart muscle (hypertrophic cardiomyopathy), is the most common cause. Please see the document on [Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy](#) for additional information.

While small clot formation takes time, the final manifestation of a **saddle thrombus** 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. No direct diagnostic can confirm the exact location of the patient's blood clot.

Although radiographs are often used to diagnose concurrent congestive heart failure, ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) will classify heart disease, and complete blood work and urine testing will provide overall health status of the patient.

TREATMENT

Early detection of heart disease on annual physical examinations (*to detect heart disease*) can allow early treatment with anti-clotting medications.

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.

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.

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).

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Once symptoms develop, the disease is already in advanced stages and paralyzed patients are most often euthanized
- Early detection of heart disease will allow some patients to be placed on anti-clotting medications to prevent formation of new blood clots, but no medication exists to break down current clots
- Please see the documents for [Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy](#) and [Congestive Heart Failure](#) for more information.