

# **FELINE CARDIOMYOPATHY**

**CARDIOMYOPATHY** is a disease of the heart muscle which results from either a very thickened heart muscle (resulting in very small heart chambers) or a very dilated (stretched) heart muscle (with very large heart chambers). Both forms result in a heart that is unable to function properly in pumping blood throughout the body.

A major complication of this condition is the tendency to develop **BLOOD CLOTS** in the heart chambers. These blood clots escape the heart and travel through the arteries until reaching a point too small for them to continue. The clot then obstructs blood flow to the rest of the body from that point on. The most common location of this obstruction is where the aorta splits to go down each rear leg. When this happens, the cat suddenly in a great pain becoming quickly paralyzed in the rear legs. This is the first sign of cardiomyopathy in many cats—and is the reason the cat is brought to the veterinary clinic.

**Causes** of this condition are often unknown, but the following medical problems have been identified as potential causes:

1. **TAURINE DEFICIENCY.** Taurine is an essential amino acid and was found to be deficient in many commercial cat foods before being identified as a problem. Cat food manufacturers have now corrected the problem since taurine was identified as being important and deficient.
2. **HYPERTHYROIDISM,** a condition resulting from an enlarged thyroid gland, can also cause the problem.

The disease develops slowly over a long period of time before clinical signs become evident. Cats have the ability to hide the disease until the very late stages. For this reason, most cases are not discovered until very late in the disease process.

**EARLY SIGNS** include inactivity and poor appetite. Severe signs of heart failure don't become evident until just before death. The major sign of heart failure in the cat is labored breathing from the inability of the heart to pump blood to the body as well as accumulation of fluid in the lungs because the blood is not flowing back to the heart fast enough.

**DIAGNOSIS** is confirmed by the ECG and chest radiographs. Ultrasound can also be useful.

**TREATMENT** will not cure the condition but may prolong the quality life of the cat for quite some time. Treated cats have lived 3 years after diagnosis. Treatment is directed at helping the heart function easier. Medications must be given on a regular basis at the appropriate times and may include:

1. Diuretics to remove excess fluid
2. Medications to dilate the arterial walls making it easier for the blood to flow
3. Blood thinners
4. Heart stimulants