

What are Symptoms of Heart Disease and What is Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)?

Most forms of heart disease will likely result in congestive heart failure (CHF). Congestive heart failure (CHF) occurs when the heart is no longer able to pump blood to the lungs and/or body at the designed volume and pressure.

When the output of blood from the heart is decreased, the relative amount of blood entering the heart is increased through compensatory mechanisms of the body. The balance of fluid pressures in the upstream blood vessels and surrounding tissues changes. When these pressures are increased, blood fluids leave the vessels and congest the surrounding tissues, resulting in pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs), pleural fluid (fluid building up in the space between the lungs and the chest wall), pericardial fluid (fluid in the sac that surrounds the heart) or ascites (fluid in abdomen). At this stage, the signs of CHF become evident.

The most common signs of CHF include:

- Coughing
- Changes in breathing
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Shortness of breath
 - Labored breathing
 - Rapid/fast breathing
- Changes in behavior
 - Tiring easily
 - Reluctance to exercise/not wanting to go for walks
 - Less playful
 - Slowing down/lack of energy
 - Depressed/withdrawn
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss
- Fainting/collapsing
- Weakness
- Restlessness, especially at night
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Some or all of the clinical signs above may appear, and all have an impact on the pet's quality of life.

If your pet has been diagnosed with a condition that could lead to congestive heart failure, it helps your cardiologist to measure the resting respiratory rate at home. Please refer to the separate "how-to" guide on our website.