# FELINE CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE (CHF)

## What is Congestive Heart Failure?

Congestive heart failure (CHF) happens when a cat's heart can no longer function as well as it should. When this happens, fluid builds up in the body. Fluid may collect in:

- The lungs (pulmonary edema)
- Around the lungs in the chest cavity (pleural effusion)
- Around the heart (pericardial effusion)
- The belly (ascites)

This fluid buildup makes it hard for your cat to breathe and get enough oxygen. CHF is not a disease by itself, but a complication of underlying heart disease. The most common heart disease in cats is Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM), where the heart muscle becomes too thick.

## What Causes CHF in Cats?

CHF is almost always secondary to heart muscle diseases known as cardiomyopathy and more rarely congenital heart defects (birth defects). Occasionally high blood pressure and elevated thyroid levels can also contribute to the development of CHF.

## Signs of CHF in Cats

Cats are very good at hiding illness and pain. Signs of CHF can be subtle at first and become serious quickly. Call your veterinarian if you see any of these signs:

- Fast or difficult breathing
- Breathing with an open mouth
- Low energy, weakness, or hiding more than usual
- Reduced appetite or vomiting
- Sudden weakness or collapse

**Emergency Warning:**

**If your cat is struggling to breathe or breathing with an open mouth, seek emergency veterinary care right away.**



## How is CHF Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian may use several tests to find and monitor CHF, such as:

- X-rays to look for fluid in the lungs or chest
- Ultrasound of the heart (echocardiogram) to see how the heart is working
- Blood pressure measurement
- Blood tests, including heart-related markers
- ECG (electrocardiogram) to check heart rhythm and rate

## Can CHF be Treated?

CHF is a serious condition, but most cats can be managed with treatment. The treatment may include:

- Diuretics ("water pills") to reduce fluid buildup
- Medications to improve heart function, control blood pressure, treat abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias), and lower the risk of blood clots
- Oxygen therapy during breathing emergencies
- Nutritional support
- Reducing stress at home

Each cat's treatment plan is customized and may change over time. Regular check-ups and follow up appointments are very important.

## What is the Prognosis?

Many cats with CHF can live many months to years with proper treatment and close veterinary care. Outcomes depend on the cause of the heart disease, how early CHF is found and treated, and how well your cat responds to medication. The primary goal is to maintain your cat's quality of life. With treatment, many cats remain comfortable and continue to enjoy their daily routines.

## Your Role as a Caregiver

You are an important part of your cat's healthcare team and instrumental in helping provide care for your cat. You can help by watching for changes in breathing or behavior, giving medications exactly as prescribed, keeping all follow up appointments, and calling your veterinary team with questions or concerns. Your veterinary team is here to support you every step of the way.

**Visit catfriendly.com/heart for additional information and resources on heart disease.**

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