

FELINE HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY (HCM)



What is Feline Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy?

Feline Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the most common heart disease in cats, affecting one in seven cats. It occurs when the walls of the heart muscle, most often the left ventricle, become abnormally thick. This thickening makes it harder for the heart to fill with blood and pump blood through the body. Over time, HCM can place extra strain on the heart and may lead to serious complications.



Which Cats are at Risk?

HCM can affect cats of any age, breed, or sex. It is more commonly diagnosed in middle aged and male cats. Certain breeds, including Maine Coons and Ragdolls, are at higher risk and have known genetic mutations that contribute to development of this condition.



What are the Signs of HCM?

Many cats with HCM show no signs in the early disease stages. In some cats, HCM can lead to complications such as congestive heart failure (CHF), blood clot formation, and even sudden death. Call your veterinarian if you see any of these signs:

- Fast or difficult breathing
- Low energy or reduced activity
- Sudden weakness, collapse, or fainting
- Reduced appetite
- Vomiting
- Vocalizing or signs of pain
- Inability to use the hind limbs or dragging of any leg

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Emergency Warning:

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



How is HCM Diagnosed?

An ultrasound of the heart, also called an echocardiogram, is the most accurate test for diagnosing HCM. A physical examination, x-rays, electrocardiogram (ECG), and blood tests, such as the cardiac biomarker NTproBNP, may help decide if an echocardiogram is needed. Your veterinarian will listen to your cat's heart at each check-up. All kitten and adult cats should have a veterinary check-up at least once a year (more frequent for cats with health conditions), and senior cats (10+) should be seen every six months.



Can HCM be Cured?

There is no cure for HCM. However, early diagnosis and proper treatment can help manage the disease and slow its progression. Many cats with HCM can live comfortably for years with good veterinary care. A newer medication may help slow or possibly reverse early HCM in some cats, but it is only approved for certain cases, is still being studied, and is not appropriate for cats with diabetes or liver disease.



What are the Treatment Options?

Treatment is adapted for each cat and may include:

- Medications to relax the heart muscle, prevent blood clots, control heart rate, and/or manage fluid buildup
- Monitoring disease progression with regular checkups and imaging
- Lifestyle adjustments like reducing stress and maintaining a healthy weight can support heart health



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 bringing in your cat for routine check-ups, watching for changes in breathing or behavior, giving medications exactly as prescribed, and keeping all follow up appointments. Your veterinary team is here to answer your questions and support both you and your cat as you manage HCM together.

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