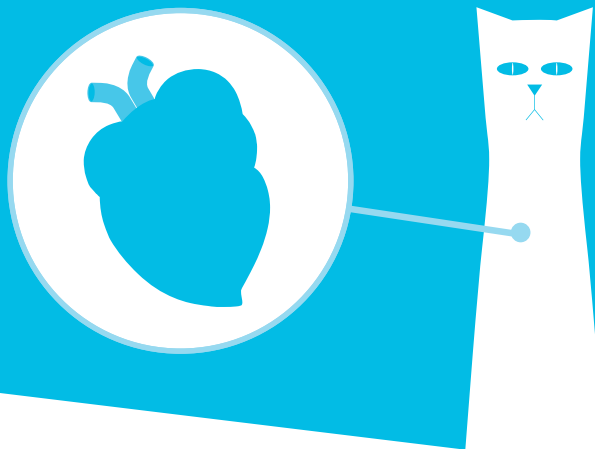


Heart murmur



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDES



The heart is a muscle that pumps blood around the body, providing it with oxygen and nutrients. The normal pumping and shutting of valves in the heart causes the 'lub-dub' heart sounds that a vet listens for with a stethoscope.

A heart murmur means that, in addition to normal heart sounds, the vet can also hear extra, abnormal sounds.

Although a murmur can signify a problem with the heart, many healthy cats can have a heart murmur without there being any significant problem with the heart's function. The cat's body still receives all the blood and, therefore, the oxygen and nutrients it needs without causing any physical problems.

What causes a heart murmur?

Abnormal sounds can be heard, either because:

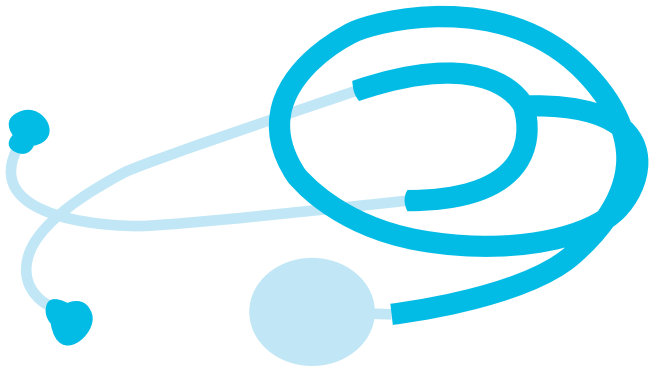
- there is a defect in the heart or its blood vessels due to a disease of the heart or a congenital problem (ie a problem the cat is born with), or
- other changes are affecting the heart, such as speed of pumping, blood pressure or thickness of the blood

What are the signs?

A heart murmur can generally only be detected by the vet listening with a stethoscope. It is often picked up at the time of a routine health check, such as at vaccination. If the cause of the murmur is not affecting the function of your cat's heart, he will appear normal.

If the cause of the murmur *is* affecting the function of the heart, then signs may include:

- lethargy
- abnormal breathing
- weight loss in adults (or poor growth in kittens)
- loss of appetite
- pale gums



How is it diagnosed?

A vet will initially diagnose and assess the level of heart murmur using a stethoscope.

The vet will also look for other signs of underlying disease. If there are concerns that the heart murmur indicates a significant underlying problem, special tests may be undertaken to identify the presence of a defect or disease, including:

- blood tests
- X-rays
- an ECG (electrocardiogram)
- an ultrasound scan

What treatment is available?

If the cause of the murmur is affecting the heart's function, then any underlying disease or defect will be treated accordingly. This may include:

- heart surgery, for congenital defects
- oral medication, for acquired disease or other disease

If the murmur does not appear to be associated with any functional problem, then treatment is unlikely to be necessary. In this case, regular follow-up examinations may be recommended to monitor the murmur and check for any clinical signs of heart disease.

What does the future hold?

Many healthy cats with a heart murmur never develop any problems associated with the heart's function and go on to lead long and healthy lives.

However, the prognosis is dependent on the cause of the heart murmur. If significant disease is present, treatment may help support your cat, but his heart function can deteriorate and treatment become less effective. Unfortunately, if his quality of life becomes poor then he may need to be euthanased.

This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **www.cats.org.uk**



Cats Protection, National Cat Centre,
Chelwood Gate, Nr Haywards Heath RH17 7TT

Helpline: 03000 12 12 12 Email: cp@cats.org.uk
Web: www.cats.org.uk VET01-2009 **CODE: 4073**

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