What You Should Know About Pulmonary Edema

The lungs are formed by tubes that transport air and by small sacs called alveoli. Oxygen enters the body and bloodstream through alveoli. This movement of oxygen is called respiration. Oxygen is taken by the blood and transported throughout the body, and carbon dioxide is carried by the blood to the alveoli where it moves out into the alveoli and is exhaled.

Pulmonary edema is an accumulation of fluid within the alveoli and air tubes. Pulmonary edema may develop slowly, causing breathing difficulties only when the animal exerts itself. When pulmonary edema develops rapidly, the animal suffers from acute respiratory distress within minutes or hours. A complete spectrum of disease, therefore, exists between the effects of slow and rapid accumulation of fluid.

Causes
One of the primary causes of pulmonary edema is heart failure. Other causes include: underlying lung disease; trauma; blood; electrical shock; smoke inhalation; allergic reaction; and drowning.

Diagnosis
The history that you give your veterinarian – including trauma such as a blow to the head, and the recent administration of drugs, new foods or vaccines – will often help your veterinarian recognize pulmonary edema.
Your veterinarian will perform some or all of the following diagnostic tests: a physical exam including auscultation (listening with a stethoscope) and palpation (examining by touching) of the chest; X-rays; ECGs; blood tests; and urinalyses.

Treatment and Home Care

Mild pulmonary edema may respond to enforced rest such as hospitalization. More severe fluid accumulation is treated with medications that stimulate fluid absorption (diuretics), medications that widen the breathing tubes, sedatives and oxygen supplementation.

Treating the cause of pulmonary edema may include preventing your pet from chewing on electrical cords or giving antibiotics for chronic infections or corticosteroids and antihistamines for allergies.

Heart disease is one of the most common medical problems in dogs and cats and is a primary cause of pulmonary edema. Heart disease is treated with special low-sodium pet foods and with drugs to strengthen the heart.

When your pet goes home, you'll need to monitor its breathing. If your pet begins to have difficulty breathing, call your veterinarian at once. Also, make sure that your pet is eating its normal amount of food and that you follow your veterinarian’s instructions for exercise restriction. Give all medications as directed and carefully follow your veterinarian’s advice regarding follow-up appointments.

Nutritional Plan

If your pet has pulmonary edema due to heart failure, your veterinarian may give you special feeding instructions. Many pets with heart failure benefit from foods low in sodium. These foods reduce the workload of the heart by reducing fluid accumulation in the body. Foods with moderate sodium restriction are useful for managing early heart failure. Such foods include Hill’s® Prescription Diet® g/d® Canine and g/d® Feline Early Cardiac-Healthy Aging. If clinical signs of heart failure and pulmonary edema persist or develop when your pet is fed a special food with moderate sodium restriction, your veterinarian may recommend a very low-sodium food to help reduce fluid retention. Such special foods include Prescription Diet® h/d® Canine Cardiac Health.

Transitioning Food

Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix the new food with your pet’s former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn’t readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature, hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). Feed only the recommended food. Don’t feed additional salt or any snacks that may contain sodium. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

Presented as an educational service by

Home Care Instructions

Client's Name: __________________________

Patient's Name: __________________________

Medication(s): __________________________

Nutritional Recommendation: __________________________

Follow-Up Appointment: __________________________ (Hospital Stamp Area Above)

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