

ORAH Info:

Blood pressure screening



About 1-10% of dogs and cats have high blood pressure (hypertension).

Animals, unlike humans, virtually never have hypertension by itself. Animals' elevated blood pressures are almost always due to an underlying disease.

OLDER PETS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM HYPERTENSION

Among the causes of high blood pressure are kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, and Cushing's Disease (a disease in which the adrenal glands secrete too much steroid hormone). Most patients who have these diseases are older pets.

Kidney failure and hyperthyroidism are very common chronic diseases of older cats. About 65% of cats with kidney disease have high blood pressure.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF HYPERTENSION?

These may include vision loss, attitude and appetite changes, nosebleed (rarely), or neurologic signs such as seizures, confusion, or stumbling. However, most animals with high blood pressure don't show any of these signs.

COULD HYPERTENSION HARM MY PET?

High blood pressure can damage organs with strong blood supply, such as the brain, eyes, kidneys and heart. Hypertension can cause strokes, and can lead to sudden blindness from retinal detachment. High blood pressure can worsen heart disease by increasing the work that the heart has to do to move blood around the body. Hypertension can also accelerate the progress of kidney failure.

Some of the damage caused by high blood pressure can, in some cases, be reversed with proper treatment. But it's better to catch hypertension before these changes occur, so we can prevent them from happening.

WHO SHOULD BE SCREENED FOR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Any senior pet with unexplained weight loss, weight gain, appetite change, increased thirst and/or urination, mental changes, seizures, or vision changes should have blood pressure testing. Because hypertension in animals is usually related to an underlying disease, it is not currently recommended to screen outwardly healthy animals. However, if we suspect disease, especially in an older animal, it makes sense to test blood pressure just as we test urine and blood values, take x-rays, and recommend ultrasound.

Blood pressure measurements, just as in humans, can be falsely elevated with stress. To avoid this, we try to keep your pet as relaxed as possible. To confirm true hypertension, we need to interpret findings in the light of other information about the animal's health, and often will need to measure blood pressure on several different occasions. Generally, readings consistently over 160 are considered too high. (We only use one number, the systolic pressure, because diastolic pressure readings are not considered reliable in pets.)

HOW IS HYPERTENSION TREATED?

In most cases, high blood pressure is readily treatable with oral medication. The choice of medication often depends on the underlying disease causing the hypertension. After starting medication, we'll need to recheck your pet's blood pressure. Side effects of the medication can include weakness, dizziness, or fainting, but these are usually resolved with dosage adjustments.

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