

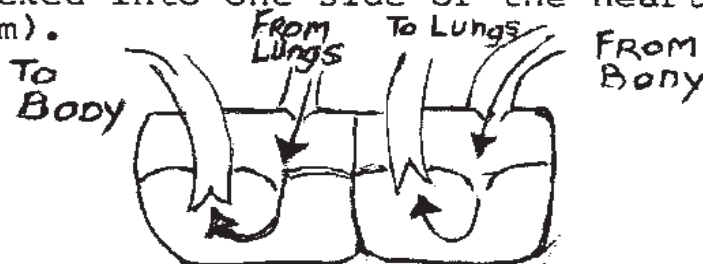
ALL ANIMAL CLINIC

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HEART DISEASE

The heart of an animal functions exactly like that of a human being - pumping blood to all parts of the body. This organ may be thought of as a four chambered pump, each chamber being separated from the next by a one-way valve. In the normal animal, every time the heart beats, blood is sucked into one side of the heart and pumped out the other (see diagram).



This is a simplified version of what happens, but it will serve our purpose for the following discussion:

Heart disease occurs when some part of the pumping system does not function properly. The following types of problems are the most commonly diagnosed forms of heart disease:

1. Heart murmurs - abnormal sounds heard during the heart beat; usually indicates a leaky valve in the system. While not "heart disease" by the strictest definition, it may alert the Veterinarian to future problems.
2. Heartworm disease - disease caused by parasites living in the heart, decreasing the amount of blood getting to the lungs.
3. Cardiomyopathy in giant breed dogs - an actual disease of the heart muscle itself resulting in heart failure.
4. Congestive heart failure - the result of all forms of heart disease, where the animal is actually showing signs of illness.

Heart disease may be diagnosed by the following procedures:

1. Physical examination
2. Chest radiographs
3. Electrocardiograms
4. Heartworm tests

While heart disease is usually progressive, early diagnosis and treatment can slow many forms of the disease and make the animal more comfortable. If your animal is showing any of the following signs, please make an appointment for a complete examination:

1. Coughing
2. Weakness after exercise
3. Fainting
4. Distended or swollen abdomen
5. Weight loss
6. Difficulty and rapid breathing

With proper treatment and management, an animal with heart disease can lead a fairly normal life.

