



## Associated Veterinary Specialists, PC, LTD

12462G Natural Bridge Road

Bridgeton, Missouri 63044

314-739-1510

Emergency 314-739-3330

### What is a heart murmur?

Heart murmurs are abnormal whooshing or swishing sounds that occur during the heartbeat cycle. This noise is created by turbulent blood flow through the heart valves. Heart murmurs may be present at birth (congenital) or develop later on in life. Identification of a heart murmur may indicate an underlying heart problem.

A heart murmur can be harmless and not require treatment. Heart murmurs may also result from mild or severe heart disease and require monitoring and treatment.

A heart murmur usually has no obvious clinical signs and usually identified during a physical examination performed by your veterinarian. If your pet has any of the following clinical signs, it may indicate an underlying heart problem:

- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing
- Exercise intolerance
- Fainting
- Lethargy

Murmurs in young puppies and kittens may be benign if they are very quiet. These quiet murmurs should go away by the age of 4 months. If the heart murmur does not go away, it may be secondary to a congenital heart disease such as a septal defect, shunt or a valve abnormality.

Some of the common acquired diseases in older animals that can cause a heart murmur include the following:

- Degenerative valve disease- thickening and irregularity of the valves keep the valve from closing properly. The changes to the valve occur as a pet ages and occurs most commonly in smaller breed dogs.
- Cardiomyopathy- dogs and cats can develop changes to the muscle of the heart disease that can cause a heart murmur. The most common heart disease in cats is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and the most common in dogs is dilated cardiomyopathy.

Risk factors that can increase the likelihood of a pet having a heart murmur include the following:

- Age
- Breed
- Previous medical history or underlying medical conditions



**Associated Veterinary Specialists, PC, LTD**

12462G Natural Bridge Road

Bridgeton, Missouri 63044

314-739-1510

Emergency 314-739-3330

-Family history of heart murmurs

In order to determine if your pet needs further evaluation of their heart murmur, several factors are taken into account

-What is the age and breed of your pet? Symptomatic? Family history?

-How loud is the murmur? Heart murmurs are rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the loudest.

-Where is the murmur in the heart?

-When does the heart murmur occur in the heart cycle?

-Species. It is difficult to know if a heart murmur in a cat indicates underlying disease and the only way to know for sure is further evaluation with advanced imaging.

If your veterinarian feels that the heart murmur may be significant, the following tests may be recommended:

-Chest x-ray- this test shows an image of the heart, lungs and blood vessels. It can help to determine if the heart is enlarged and the disease could be significant and may require further imaging.

-Electrocardiogram (ECG)- this test is used to evaluate the electrical impulses that the heart makes and helps to identify problems with the heart rhythm.

-Echocardiogram- this is a noninvasive ultrasound test that evaluates the heart's structure and function. The echocardiogram is able to identify abnormal heart valves, structural defects and can further evaluate heart enlargement.

If your pet has a heart murmur, treatment may or may not be necessary. The decision to monitor or pursue treatment is specific to your individual pet and the best course of action will be discussed in detail by your veterinarian.

Kimberly Loyd, DVM, DACVIM

Reference: Seattle Veterinary Specialists