

### What is aortic thromboembolism?

Aortic thromboembolism is a condition when a large blood clot lodges in the artery to the hindlegs. In cats this is usually a sudden event occurring secondary to severe heart disease resulting in pain and paralysis of one or both hindlegs. In dogs this disease is rare and tends to cause chronic weakness and lameness rather than the dramatic signs seen in cats.

### What are the signs of this disease in cats?

Cats may have a history of heart disease with signs such as breathlessness, lethargy and weight loss or, the thromboembolism may be the first sign of illness. These clots form in the heart and then travel via the arterial circulation until they lodge in a vessel. In cats, as these clots often occlude blood flow to one or both hindlegs the affected limbs become weak or paralysed, painful, develop a blue / purple colour most readily appreciated by looking at the foot pads and also the limb(s) may be cool to the touch. Whilst the hindlimbs are most commonly affected, the clots can potentially lodge elsewhere causing forelimb lameness or other organ damage.

In summary the signs of a clot in a limb are:

- Paralysis
- Pain
- Purple discolouration of the foot pads
- Cold limb

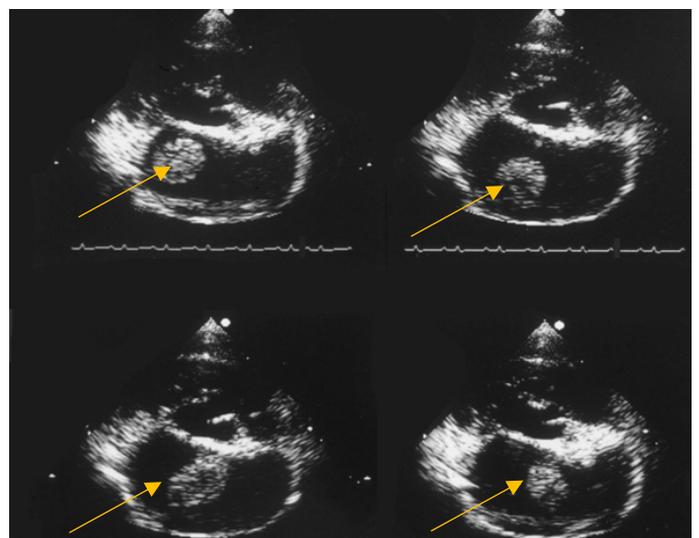
As this is a very painful condition please seek advice from a veterinary surgeon as soon as possible.

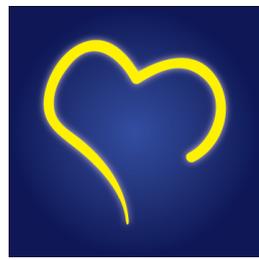
### How is the disease diagnosed in cats?

Examination of your cat by a veterinary surgeon will help to establish whether a blood clot is likely to be present. Your cat may then be referred to a Specialist Cardiologist for further evaluation.

Echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart) is used to assess heart size and function. Echocardiography is painless examination that is performed without any anaesthetic or sedation and, at our centre, you can be present with your cat whilst this test is performed. The aim of echocardiography is to establish whether there is underlying heart disease and guide decisions regarding treatment.

The four echocardiography images below show a large mobile clot (arrow) in the left atrium of a cat.





### Can thromboembolic disease be treated?

Blood clot formation is often a serious complication of advanced heart disease in cats and many cats that survive the first episode will experience recurrence.

If there is severe underlying heart disease, the probability of recurrence of the blood clot coupled with the distressing signs associated with severe pain, result in many owners making the sad decision to request euthanasia.

In cases that are less severely affected, treatment with medications to reduce the risk of clot formation may be indicated. In cats with concurrent heart failure additional medications will be given daily to control signs such as breathlessness. Especially during the early stages of recovery, good nursing and physiotherapy can be very important.

### Key points

- Aortic thromboembolism is an uncommon but distressing condition seen more commonly in cats than in dogs,
- In cats thromboembolism is commonly secondary to significant heart disease,
- The affected limb(s),
- Sadly the outlook for cats with this condition is often poor.