



# Feline Heart Murmurs

Owner information sheet





The heart is a muscle made up of four chambers that pump blood around the body. A murmur is heard when blood flows abnormally through the heart. There are a number of different causes for this:

1. Leaking heart valves – this is when blood leaks backwards through one of the valves in the heart, essentially flowing in the wrong direction.
2. A hole in the heart - if there is a small hole between the chambers of the heart blood will jet through this and cause turbulence.
3. Murmurs due to other illnesses – conditions such as anaemia can cause the blood to thin and flow faster.
4. Innocent murmurs – these are murmurs in young animals, usually under 6 months old, caused by fast blood flow through the heart due to the higher heart rate of young animals. As the animal grows the heart rate slows and these murmurs tend to disappear.

#### WHAT DOES THE GRADE MEAN?

We grade murmurs from 1 to 6, this is just a measure of how loud the murmur sounds when we listen with a stethoscope. A grade 1 is barely audible and a grade 6 is so loud we can also feel the murmur through the chest wall. Although a murmur may signify a problem with the heart or its blood vessels, approximately fifty percent of healthy cats with a heart murmur don't have any underlying disease – and of those that do, many live quite normally without ever developing any signs of disease.

#### WHAT TESTS HAS MY PET HAD DONE?

Every cat that comes into our care receives a full health check. If our vets detect a heart murmur they will assess the grade of that murmur and determine the best course of action.

Adult cats (over 6 months) with a murmur of Grades 1-3, and no other signs of heart disease, will be homed without any further investigations performed. Any cat with a murmur grade 4 or above, or those with other clinical signs associated with heart disease, will receive a blood test to look for evidence of heart damage. Based on the results of our investigations, our vet team is now happy to rehome your cat as we were satisfied from the results of our work-up that there are currently no signs that the heart is diseased or being adversely affected by the murmur. The blood test does not directly tell us the cause of the murmur, but that it is not currently causing any problems. However, murmurs can change and we would recommend regular check-ups at your own vet, to monitor for any changes in the murmur or other signs of heart disease. Some examples of clinical signs of heart disease include panting like a dog, rapid breathing, coughing, not being able to exercise etc.

Young cats (under 6 months old) with a grade 1 or 2 murmur are most likely to have an innocent murmur and receive no further diagnostics. In this case we would recommend that your cat receives regular heart checks with your own vet, which is usually performed at their routine vaccination appointments though your vet might recommend more frequent checks if they detect a change in the murmur. Any young cat with a grade 3 murmur or louder has had further investigation (additional physical exams plus blood test or ultrasound). Your cat has



been passed for rehoming because we are satisfied from the result of any diagnostics that there are currently no signs of heart failure. If your cat has had the blood test rather than an ultrasound then we are unable to identify the cause of the murmur but have checked that the heart muscle is not damaged. In some cases where an ultrasound has been performed we might advise a follow-up scan in 6 months' time to ensure your cat's growth has not affected any defects found, but you will be responsible for ensuring your cat attends the appointment and for any follow up treatment that is recommended (in conjunction with your own vet).

#### WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

Your cat's heart murmur is not currently causing any clinical concerns, however we would always recommend that your pet receives regular health checks with your own vet as heart murmurs can change in time.

Please bear in mind that due to the diagnosis made in the rescue centre, there will likely be insurance exclusions on any pet insurance policy you take out. You should discuss potential exclusions with your chosen insurance provider before finalising a policy.