

Feline Heartworm Disease

1. Just one worm can lead to severe disease- even death
 - cats usually carry 1-3 worms that live approximately 2 years
 - ectopic migration of L4 larvae is more common than in dogs
2. Clinical signs of heartworm disease in cats can be confused with other diseases:
 - Respiratory signs: chronic cough, respiratory distress
 - Gastrointestinal signs: vomiting
 - Central nervous system signs, lethargy, blindness, and sudden death all may occur
3. Diagnosis may require several tests:
 - antigen test - low sensitivity in cats (low # of worms)
 - antibody test - indicates exposure to the worm, not necessarily current heartworm infestation
 - microfilaria test - if found, diagnostic - transient in blood
 - radiography - DV or VD view best - see pulmonary arterial enlargement and bronchointerstitial lung disease
 - echocardiography - diagnostic if parasite seen -worms may be in or near heart

4. Treatment vs. Nontreatment

Risks of treating:

- worm death can lead to severe complications within a few weeks
- cats can die within an hour of the onset of signs
- treated cats need constant monitoring
- no approved product for treatment of cats

Risks of not treating

- risk of acute disease and sudden death
- onset of clinical signs is impossible to predict
- symptomatic therapy with corticosteroids does not alter progression of the disease

5. Prevention is the BEST OPTION

- 100% effective in preventing heartworm disease
- can be safely given to cats infected with adult heartworms
- removes and controls adult and immature hookworms
- two convenient sizes: up to 5 lbs, and 5-15 lbs

6. Specifics about the feline heartgard chewable product

- for use in cats 6 weeks and older
- for cats over 15 lbs, combine pills appropriately
- small size is 55 mcg, large size is 165 mcg
- better absorption if cat eating (do not fast)
- if the cat does not eat the whole thing, dose with another whole chewable that day
- pieces of the chewable may pass whole in the feces
- vomiting and diarrhea are extremely rare side effects
- safe in pregnant and breeding animals
- protect from light (store in box), stable for 2 years

- Susan L. Leck, DVM, Diplomate ABVP

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