**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

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