



# Monitoring

## Resting Respiratory Rates

### RESTING RESPIRATORY RATES FOR MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT OF LEFT SIDED CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE

Resting respiratory rates are a valuable tool for determining if your pet is developing fluid in its lungs secondary to left sided congestive heart failure. In fact, elevated resting respiratory rates are the earliest, and most objective sign of left sided congestive heart failure. If the disease process is recognized at this early stage, appropriate therapy can be initiated before the onset of a stressful and often costly respiratory crisis.

**What is a resting respiratory rate?** It is the rate, or times per minute, that your dog or cat breathes in one minute, while at complete rest - NOT when your pet is playing or excited - NOT when it is panting - NOT after it has just eaten or is settling down from a walk. The resting respiratory rate should be taken when your pet is completely relaxed and resting, or even sleeping. To obtain a resting respiratory rate, watch your dog or cat take a breath in and then exhale. That is one breath. Count how many breaths he/she takes in 15 seconds. Then take that number and multiply it by 4 to get the breaths per minute ( $15 \times 4 = 60$  seconds).

### When do I check the resting respiratory rate?

- 1) If your dog or cat has been diagnosed with heart disease, but is not currently having any clinical signs, it would be of tremendous value to determine your pet's normal resting respiratory rate. In the future, if the rate consistently increases to above 40 breaths per minute at rest, you should have him/her evaluated at your veterinary hospital within 24 to 48 hours. Evaluation should include a physical examination and x-rays of his/her chest. If a diagnosis of left sided congestive heart failure is made, appropriate therapy will be initiated and an echocardiogram recommended for further assessment.
- 2) If your dog or cat has been diagnosed with left sided congestive heart failure and has already begun therapy, monitoring resting respiratory rates can help you determine, at home, how well they are responding and if adjustments to therapy may be needed. If you are concerned about your pet's status, you should contact your veterinary clinic. They will ask you what your pet's resting respiratory rate is. This provides your vet with an objective measurement form which to make further recommendations. They may recommend you give an extra dose of a diuretic and see how your pet responds, or they may ask that you bring your pet in for further assessment and care.

Worried about your pet's heart disease? Take a deep breath, then count theirs. Early intervention and close monitoring is the key to helping your pet breath easy and live longer.

Veterinary Cardiology Specialists, PLLC

612-353-7440

janet.olson@vetcardiologist.com

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