

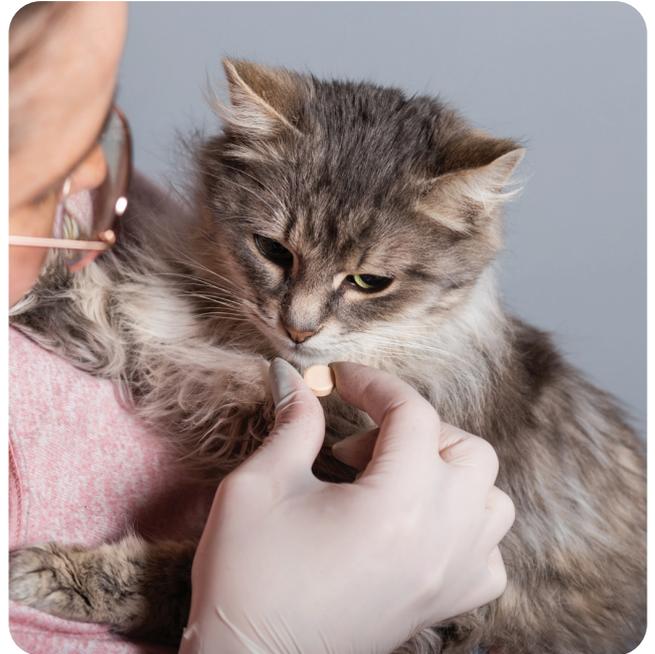
Cardiac Medications



When your pet is diagnosed with heart disease, it can feel like a lot to take in. You may be worried about what the future holds, how difficult treatment will be, or whether your pet will still be able to enjoy a good quality of life.

At Sawgrass Veterinary Cardiology, we understand how overwhelming this can feel, and we are here to guide you every step of the way.

One of the most important tools we use to support pets with heart disease is medication. These medicines are carefully chosen to help the heart work more effectively, reduce fluid build-up, manage blood pressure or irregular rhythms, and ease the symptoms that make daily life harder. In many cases, the right combination of medications can give pets not just more time, but better time with the people who love them.



How Long Will My Pet Need Medication For?

It's important to know that cardiac medications are usually a long-term commitment. Once your pet begins treatment, the medications often become part of their daily routine for life.

Dosages may be adjusted over time, and additional medications may be added as the disease changes. Our role is to walk with you through those adjustments and to make sure every decision is guided by your pet's comfort and well-being.

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Is Administering Medication To A Pet Easy?

Giving medications at home may take some practice, but most families find a rhythm quickly. Pills can often be given with food or hidden in treats, and our team is happy to share tips to make the process easier. The key is consistency: medications work best when they are given exactly as prescribed. Stopping suddenly or missing doses can put unnecessary strain on your pet's heart, so if you ever face challenges, please let us know so we can help. You'll also find some helpful tips on page 5.

Are There Any Side Effects Of Taking Medications?

Like all medicines, cardiac drugs can sometimes cause side effects. Some pets may drink more water, urinate more frequently, or seem more tired. Others may experience changes in appetite, vomiting, or diarrhea. These effects are not always a reason to stop medication, but they are important to monitor. If you notice anything new or concerning, call us right away so we can adjust the plan if needed.

Will I Still Need To See My Veterinarian?

Ongoing monitoring is part of caring for a pet with heart disease. Regular recheck visits and occasional blood work allow us to see how well the medications are working and to make sure your pet's body is tolerating them. At each visit, we will explain what we are looking for, what we have found, and what steps come next so you always know where you stand.

Above all, with the right medications, ongoing monitoring, and your dedication at home, many pets with heart disease live active, loving lives for years after their diagnosis. At Sawgrass Veterinary Cardiology, we are committed to making sure you never feel alone on this journey. Together, we will create a treatment plan that fits your pet's needs and gives you more good days together.

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What Are Some Of The Most Common Cardiac Medications?

Pimobendan (Vetmedin)

One of the most important and widely used heart medications in dogs is pimobendan (Vetmedin). This drug helps the heart pump more efficiently and reduces the pressure it works against. It's typically prescribed for dogs with mitral valve disease or dilated cardiomyopathy, and has been proven in large studies such as the EPIC trial to delay the onset of congestive heart failure and significantly prolong survival—with minimal side effects.

Pimobendan is usually given twice daily and is commonly dispensed as a palatable chewable tablet.

Furosemide (Lasix)

If your pet is in congestive heart failure (CHF) or has developed fluid buildup in the lungs or abdomen, a diuretic called furosemide (Lasix) is often used. This medication increases urine output to remove excess fluid, helping pets breathe more comfortably. Because it can affect hydration and kidney function, pets on furosemide require close monitoring with bloodwork and physical exams. It's critical that pets on this medication continue to eat and drink normally to avoid dehydration.

Benazepril

Many pets are also prescribed an ACE inhibitor, such as benazepril. This medication helps reduce pressure within the heart, minimize heart muscle scarring, and in some studies, has been shown to delay the onset of CHF—particularly in breeds like Dobermans with early-stage dilated cardiomyopathy. ACE inhibitors are also used in pets with protein-losing kidney disease or systemic hypertension. Benazepril is generally well tolerated and given once or twice daily, but routine blood pressure and kidney monitoring are important.

Spiroinolactone

Another common medication in heart failure treatment is spiroinolactone, an aldosterone receptor blocker. In humans, it also acts as a potassium-sparing diuretic. Aldosterone, a hormone produced by the

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adrenal gland, promotes fluid retention and contributes to cardiac fibrosis (scarring). By blocking aldosterone receptors, the negative effects of aldosterone can be inhibited. Spironolactone is typically used alongside furosemide and ACE inhibitors in dogs with CHF and helps reduce both fluid retention and harmful remodeling of the heart. It may elevate potassium, so regular electrolyte monitoring is essential.

Atenolol

In some pets—especially those with hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy (HOCM), arrhythmias, or outflow tract obstructions—a beta blocker like atenolol may be prescribed. Atenolol slows the heart rate, stabilizes rhythm, and reduces myocardial oxygen demand, which is particularly beneficial in cats with HOCM and dogs with pulmonic stenosis. It's typically given once or twice daily and should never be stopped abruptly, as this can lead to rebound effects or dangerous arrhythmias.

Sildenafil

Sildenafil is a medication used in veterinary cardiology to treat pulmonary hypertension, a condition where the blood pressure in the lungs is abnormally high. It works by relaxing the blood vessels in the lungs, reducing resistance and allowing blood to flow more easily through the pulmonary circulation. This helps decrease the workload on the heart and can improve symptoms such as exercise intolerance, coughing, and labored breathing. Sildenafil is generally well tolerated and is typically given one to three times daily, depending on your pet's specific condition and response to therapy.

Managing heart disease in pets is a collaborative, long-term process. Most pets take a combination of medications, and dosages may change as their condition evolves. The goal is always to keep your pet comfortable, breathing easily, and living a happy, active life. At Sawgrass Veterinary Cardiology, we specialize in the diagnosis, monitoring, and medical management of heart disease in dogs and cats. If your pet has recently been diagnosed with heart disease—or if you have questions about their current treatment plan—we're here to help.

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Helpful tips for giving medications

Giving medications to dogs and cats can be challenging, especially when they're not feeling well or are picky eaters. One of the most effective strategies is to hide pills in highly palatable treats like pill pockets, cheese, marshmallows, or canned food "meatballs." Some pets catch on quickly, so it helps to offer a few empty treats first, then slip the medicated one in. For liquid medications, using a flavored formulation (chicken, tuna, or beef) from a compounding pharmacy can make a big difference—especially in cats. Always follow medications with a positive experience like praise, play, or a favorite treat to build trust over time.

For more resistant pets, you may need to administer medications directly. For pills, gently open your pet's mouth and place the pill at the back of the tongue, then close the mouth and stroke the throat or blow on the nose to encourage swallowing. Alternatively, a "pill gun" can be purchased from your local pet store or online to facilitate direct medication administration.

Liquid medications can be given by slowly squirting them into the side of the mouth with a syringe, angled to avoid choking. Never crush or split pills unless instructed—some medications are coated or time-released and must stay intact. If you're struggling, ask your veterinarian about alternative formulations or a demonstration. At Sawgrass Veterinary Cardiology, we're happy to walk you through medication techniques to make life easier for both you and your pet.