

Heart Attacks are Rare in Dogs & Cats

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Q. Are heart attacks common in pets?

A. In people, the phrase "heart attack" is generally used to mean coronary thrombosis (a blockage of the blood vessels in the heart with fatty deposits). Dogs and cats very rarely get this type of heart condition, although, they do get other cardiac diseases.

The most common form of heart disease in cats is called "cardiomyopathy." This is a disease of the heart muscle itself. In the past, one type of cardiomyopathy (dilated cardiomyopathy) was more common because cats were not receiving enough of the amino acid called taurine. Now, most cat foods contain sufficient taurine to prevent this type of cardiomyopathy.

Dogs can also get cardiomyopathy, but are more prone to diseases of the valves of the heart. The valves of the heart are located between the different chambers of the heart (atria and ventricles). They prevent the blood from flowing backward through the heart. Diseases of the valves often result in heart murmurs.