

# Hypertension

Hypertension, or high blood pressure is a common condition of older cats and dogs. Persistent hypertension leads to organ damage, affecting the heart, eye, kidney and the brain.

## What causes hypertension?

Diseases such as chronic kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, other hormonal conditions and some tumours can cause hypertension. In dogs the most common cause is kidney disease, whereas in cats although kidney disease is a common cause of high blood pressure, often the cause of hypertension remains unknown (idiopathic hypertension).

## What are the signs of hypertension?

Hypertension is often referred to as 'the silent killer' as there are very few warning signs. Occasionally, end organ damage occurs such as heart failure, sudden onset blindness, or seizures and this prompts the veterinary surgeon to measure the blood pressure. However, the majority of signs associated with hypertension are vague and non-descript.

## When should my pet's blood pressure be measured?

As hypertension is difficult to recognise and is a common finding in older pets, we recommend measuring blood pressure routinely in animals over 9 years old. This is especially true of cats which show even fewer signs of high blood pressure than dogs do.

## How is my pet's blood pressure measured?

We measure the systolic (or top) blood pressure in pets routinely. It is done using an ultrasound probe and an inflatable cuff usually on one of the forelegs. We sometimes need to clip a little bit of hair from the back of the paw. This process is usually very quick and the pet usually tolerates it very well. We can often do this in a consulting slot, however some cases need more careful monitoring or other tests, in which case your pet may be admitted for a few hours.

## How is hypertension treated?

In dogs and cats hypertension is treated with daily tablets. This can either be the human drug amlodipine (or Istin®), or the ACE inhibitor benazepril (Benazecare®). Blood pressure will reduce within hours of the first tablet. In acute situations, such as when an animal presents with sudden blindness, additional faster acting medications may be used.

## What is the long term prognosis?

This often depends on the underlying cause of the hypertension, but can be very good. Even animals who present with sudden blindness if treated promptly can regain normal eyesight.

## Why does my pet need to have its bloods pressure checked regularly?

Regular checks are needed to ensure that the blood pressure is neither too high nor too low. Additionally, as this condition happens in older pets, it is important to have regular check-ups to check for any other concurrent or developing diseases.