Treating Dogs with Atrial Fibrillation

What is atrial fibrillation?
Atrial fibrillation is a type of abnormal heart rhythm that results in rapid heart rates. It is a common complication of heart disease in dogs.

Do dogs with atrial fibrillation need treatment?
Yes. Persistently high heart rates can impair heart function. If left untreated, atrial fibrillation may result in worsening heart function, congestive heart failure, and death.

How is atrial fibrillation treated in dogs?
Dogs with atrial fibrillation are treated with anti-arrhythmic medication(s) that lower the heart rate back to an acceptable heart rate range.

Why participate?
Your participation matters!
Well designed clinical trials allow veterinarians to confidently treat their patients with therapies that have been proven to be safe and effective. You and your dog help many other animals when you participate!

Contact information:
Study coordinator:
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Atrial Fibrillation in Dogs

We are inviting dogs with atrial fibrillation to participate in a clinical trial investigating the efficacy of two commonly used anti-arrhythmic medications.

UW VETERINARY CARE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON
Study Enrollment

Dogs with newly diagnosed atrial fibrillation will be considered for enrollment.
- They may be considered for enrollment if treatment with an anti-arrhythmic medication has been recommended by the UW Veterinary Care Cardiology Service.
- The Cardiology Service will determine whether treatment is warranted based on your dog’s daily average heart rate.
- The daily average heart rate is determined using a 24-hour ambulatory electrocardiogram (ECG), also known as a Holter test. This test will be recommended to manage your dog’s heart rate regardless of whether you decide to participate in the study or not.
- If enrolled, your dog will be treated with one or both of the anti-arrhythmic drugs evaluated in this study (diltiazem and/or amiodarone).

Why Is this Important?

Dogs with atrial fibrillation live longer with strict heart rate control.
It has been shown that dogs with atrial fibrillation live longer if their average daily heart rates are less than 125 beats per minute (termed strict heart rate control).

The best drug or drug combination to achieve strict heart rate control in atrial fibrillation remains unknown.
Diltiazem and amiodarone are anti-arrhythmic drugs that are commonly used to treat atrial fibrillation, however, there is little information about their efficacy for achieving strict heart rate control in dogs.

Study Objective:

Our objective is to determine if strict heart rate control can be achieved in dogs with atrial fibrillation with either diltiazem or amiodarone, or with the combination of the two drugs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are there any risks to my dog?
Both of the medications in this study are currently used for rate control in atrial fibrillation in dogs, and most dogs tolerate the medications very well.

All anti-arrhythmic drugs have the potential to cause an adverse drug reaction. Possible adverse drug reactions include gastrointestinal upset, changes in liver values, changes in thyroid values, changes in blood cell counts, corneal changes, weakness, collapse, or worsening heart failure. Your dog will be closely monitored for signs of adverse drug reactions throughout the study. Adverse effects are often reversible with reducing the drug dose or discontinuation of the medication.

How often will my dog need to be reevaluated?
Dogs are reassessed three times throughout the study.

What can I expect if my dog is enrolled?
Your dog will be monitored for disease progression and possible adverse drug reactions throughout the study. We will ask you to perform a quality of life questionnaire at every recheck appointment. We will also perform a physical examination, assess your dog’s blood pressure and collect a small amount of blood to assess your dog’s liver values, white blood cell/red blood cell counts, and thyroid function at the recheck evaluations. Three Holter tests and some of the blood testing will be paid for if you choose to participate in the study.