

Quick Tips - Internal Medicine

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Chronic Cough

In dogs, chronic cough can be secondary to respiratory disease or heart disease. Differentiating the two can sometimes be challenging but evaluating the heart rate can help. Dogs with respiratory disease often have high vagal tone and a prominent sinus arrhythmia. Dogs with heart failure have activation of the sympathetic nervous system and higher heart rates. Signalment and body condition can provide additional clues: dogs with chronic bronchitis and tracheal collapse tend to be small breed, older, and overweight.

Chronic cough in cats is typically caused by respiratory or pleural disease, not by primary heart disease. Coughing associated with feline heartworm disease results from severe heartworm-induced bronchitis. Cats with asthma are typically young to middle aged. If an older cat presents with a new cough, there should be a high suspicion for neoplasia.

Chest radiographs (high-quality, three-view films) should be taken in any patient with chronic cough. These can be used to evaluate the heart size, pulmonary vessels, bronchial walls, pulmonary parenchyma, and pleural space. Additional diagnostics to consider include: heartworm serology, fecal float, Baermann, endotracheal wash, bronchoscopy, bronchoalveolar lavage, and lung lobe aspiration. If airway samples are collected, they should be submitted for cytology and cultured for both aerobes and Mycoplasma.



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