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- Irish Wolfhound cardiomyopathy (IWCM) heart disease is not the typical dilated cardiomyopathy that is seen in breeds such as Dobermans, Boxers, Great Danes, etc.
- 99% of Irish Wolfhounds with IWCM present with atrial fibrillation usually noted by your vet or on a screening EKG.
- Atrial fibrillation in the Irish Wolfhound is inherited and genetic analysis shows dominant inheritance with variable penetrance making it a complex trait.
- The mean age of onset is 5.4 years and the incidence increases with age. Your normal 3-year-old may not be a normal 6 year old.
- A yearly EKG is recommended for all Irish Wolfhounds starting about age 4.
- Progression of disease toward congestive heart failure is highly variable. Early diagnosis is key in its management.
- Many IWs remain asymptomatic for years with medication, e.g. pimobendan. Many hounds in atrial fibrillation present with normal echocardiograms (lone atrial fib).
- Many hounds with atrial fibrillation and abnormal echocardiograms may be asymptomatic. Others will have increased panting or exercise intolerance noted by their owners. Medications are effective and usually well tolerated.
- Screening echocardiograms even at young ages (1-2 years of age) may have a finding of mild regurgitation (leaks) in one or even all four of the heart valves.
- Innocent increases in blood flow velocities can lead to soft heart murmurs in excited and physically fit dogs.
- The incidence of congenital or inherited valve disease seems low in Irish Wolfhounds. A single screening echo is advised for all breeding stock to prevent inherited congenital heart defects from becoming a problem.

