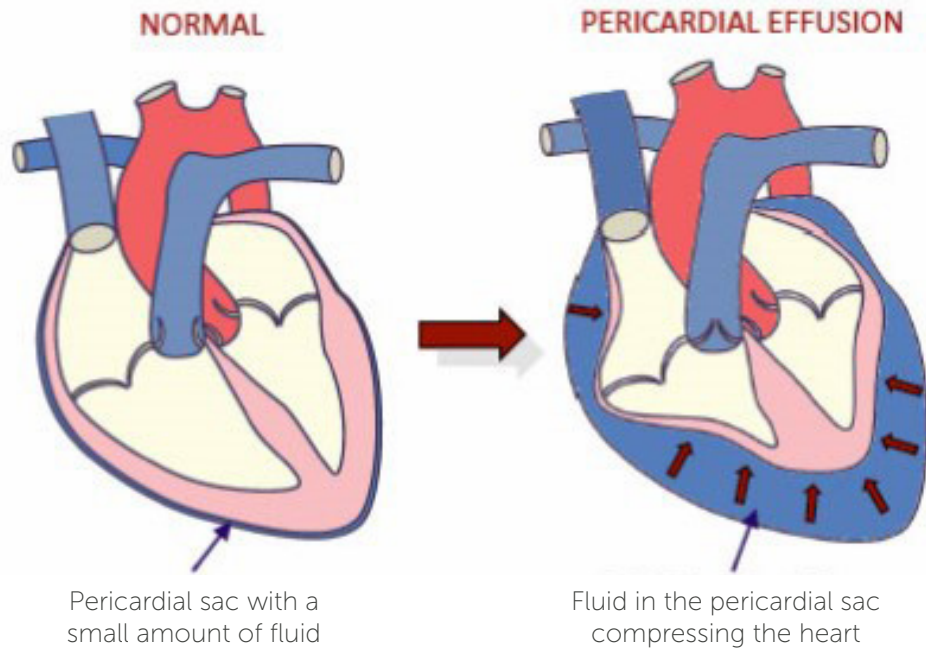


Pericardial Effusion



The heart is enclosed within a thin, membranous sac known as the pericardium. Pericardial effusion (PE) is an abnormal accumulation of fluid inside the sac. This results in increased pressure within the pericardial sac that can cause compression of the heart. This leads to the heart failing to relax and fill properly, which causes back-up of blood and leakage of fluid into the abdomen. Weakness, exercise intolerance, and collapse are common.

In dogs the two main categories of PE are neoplasia (cancer) and idiopathic (unknown cause). The presence or absence of a cancerous mass as the cause is usually confirmed by a veterinary cardiologist during an echocardiogram, or heart ultrasound.

The first treatment concern in PE is to tap out the fluid under ultrasound guidance. Then the underlying cause and prevention of recurrence must be addressed. It is then important to monitor for signs that fluid has returned, such as abdominal distension, or lethargy/collapse. If not treated in a timely fashion, these patients can experience dangerously low blood pressures, abnormal heart rhythms, and even death.