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So my cat has hypertension

What is hypertension?

Hypertension or high blood pressure is defined as sustained, high arterial blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of the blood against the vessel walls. The most common type of hypertension (accounting for at least 80% of cases) in cats is secondary hypertension meaning an underlying disease is contributing to the development of hypertension. Two common diseases that can lead to hypertension in cats are chronic kidney disease and hyperthyroidism. Normal systolic blood pressure in cats is close to ours- about 120 mmHG. In the clinic we allow for a white coat phenomenon and thus we don't typically start to worry about hypertension until the systolic blood pressure is above 160 mmHG.

What is the connection between chronic kidney disease and hypertension?

Any cat with chronic kidney disease is predisposed to developing hypertension due to the fact that some of the regulators of hypertension are produced in the kidneys. Thus changes in the kidneys can cause hypertension. Any cat with chronic kidney disease should be screened for hypertension every six to twelve months.

What are the clinical signs of hypertension?

Cats may have more than one clinical sign of hypertension or no signs at all! Some of the common signs of hypertension include:

- Increased vocalization
- Restlessness
- Blindness
- Weight loss
- Physical exam changes such as heart murmurs or arrhythmias
- Mentation changes
- Many other changes on exam and at home may be noticed

How is hypertension diagnosed?

Hypertension is diagnosed by measuring the cats systolic blood pressure. At our clinic blood pressure is measured using a Doppler, which uses ultrasound to detect blood flow through an artery. A small pressure cuff, like when humans have blood pressure measured, is placed around either the hind leg or the tail. It is slowly deflated until the sound of the blood flow is heard. Our technicians wear headphones for this so as not to scare the cats.

What are the treatment options for hypertension?

The first line of treatment for hypertension is a human drug- amlodipine. Amlodipine comes traditionally as a pill but can be made into a liquid if that is easier. Amlodipine is given once a day to start. The goal with treating hypertension is to bring the systolic blood pressure under 160 mmHG.

What monitoring is required?

- Yearly physical exams
- Yearly blood work since amlodipine is a long term prescription medication
- Regular blood pressure checks- it can take a few dose adjustments until the blood pressure is in the normal range.
 - Once the cats blood pressure is in the normal range we recommend checking the blood pressure every 3-6 months.
 - A doctor will review your cat's blood pressure at each appointment and a recommendation for when the blood pressure should be next checked again will be made.

What if I don't treat my cat for hypertension?

Untreated hypertension can have negative consequences throughout the body. Hypertension can lead to organ damage. When the blood pressure rises above 200 mmHG blindness and seizures can occur.

I want to learn more about hypertension!

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask us! We are happy to discuss this disease and treatment options further! Additionally we have more in depth hand- outs if you would like.

Sources:

VIN: Hypertension, Systemic- Dr. Michele Gaspar, DVM, DABVP (feline) , revised by Dr. Kari Rothrock, DVM

Handout Created by Dr. Zaya McSky, DVM