



# MARLTON ANIMAL HOSPITAL, P.A.

“WE CARE”

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## Heartworm Disease

### ***What is heartworm disease?***

Heartworm disease is caused by a blood parasite transmitted by mosquitoes. The disease, in which one or more worms live in the heart of the affected animal, is present worldwide wherever mosquito populations are found. While the disease affects primarily dogs, it has been known to occur in other species as well. Untreated, it may cause heart, lung, liver and kidney damage and may ultimately be fatal.

### ***How is heartworm disease diagnosed?***

A simple blood test can demonstrate the presence of heartworm infection. In some animals, further blood tests or x-rays may be required to confirm the diagnosis if the disease is suspected but not clearly demonstrable through routine screening.

### ***What signs will a heartworm infected dog show?***

An affected dog may experience weight loss, chronic cough, lack of stamina, increased thirst and perhaps even episodes of weakness or fainting. Many dogs will appear fairly normal, exhibiting only subtle, if any, changes until the disease becomes quite advanced.

### ***How is heartworm disease treated?***

Pre-treatment testing may include blood tests to determine organ function, x-rays and an EKG. Treatment to kill the adult worms in the heart requires hospitalization and several injections of an arsenic compound. Because of the serious nature of the treatment itself, close observation and monitoring of the patient are required. Follow-up therapy includes medication to destroy the stage of the parasite that circulates in the dog's bloodstream, rest, medication and monitoring of the patient's progress. After this stage, another heartworm test will be run to confirm that the treatment has been successful. The patient will then be started on heartworm preventative medication.

### ***Is there prevention available?***

Yes! After a negative heartworm test, your dog will be started on a monthly schedule of oral medication to prevent heartworm disease. There are virtually no side effects associated with these preventative medications.

### ***Does prevention of heartworm disease cost a lot?***

Absolutely not! A few pennies a day is all it costs to prevent heartworm disease. New Jersey, with its concentration of heavy mosquito populations, has a high incidence of this serious disease. We urge you to test your dog yearly and halt the spread of heartworm disease by beginning and continuing the preventative medication according to our recommendations.