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# **Despite Available Prevention, Heartworm Disease Continues to Plague our Pets**

Every year, veterinarians brace for the disease that has plagued our pets for decades. Yet this affliction is easily preventable with affordable and safe drugs. Occurrences of Heartworms in both dogs and cats persist to grow and also the expenditure to begin treating (when discovered early enough) is actually much more than the expense to prevent. Therefore, how can you protect your furry friend from the deadly effects of this now wide-spread parasite?

Flash back to 150 years ago when a researcher initially detected the heartworm parasite in a dog. Then the parasite evolved and was then discovered in our cats 80 years ago. Even though heartworm prevention is available for both cats and dogs you would think that we would experience a reduction in the number of cases, however each year hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats are diagnosed and oftentimes perish too soon from this dreaded parasite. A number of researchers speculate that in North America alone, cases of heartworms in our pets might actually be in the millions.

The disease resulting from this heartworm dwelling inside of your pet's heart is disastrous. Your pet can be infected by the one-time bite of just one single mosquito. The worm may then migrate through your pet's entire body eventually taking up residence in your pet's heart chamber and the blood vessels leading to the lungs. This leads to your pet's heart needing to pump harder to circulate the blood through his tiny body. The consequences on the lungs is much more critical with some pets gasping for breath because the lungs fill with fluid and tiny blood clots clog the vessels. Early symptoms can include coughing and exercise intolerance that some owners just attribute to the [dog](#) being lazy. Quite often, signs usually do not emerge until the disease is well advanced and the dog is being affected by heart failure, fluid accumulation in the lungs and abdomen that may subsequently result in death.

In cats, it takes merely one heartworm to trigger damage. The first signs are asthma like symptoms and frequently vomiting that the owners may attribute to hairballs. When that heartworm lodges in the lungs, it may result in a sudden death of the cat.

Treatment for heartworms is pricey starting from \$500 for the smaller sized dogs, to upwards of \$1500 for the larger breeds. Complicated heartworm disease with cardiac failure is even more expensive and oftentimes there is only a 10% chance of recovery in the severely affected pets. As of yet, there is no treatment for [cat](#) heartworm disease, just supportive care.

Amazingly, veterinarians do have a remedy to this dilemma. Safe, effective heartworm preventatives are available in a number of simple to use applications. What is even more amazing is that the expense of a lifetime of prevention for most pets is considerably less than the one-time treatment for the disease. So, why do pets continue to suffer and die from such a preventable malady?

With all cyberspace myths, two radical notions propose that either the heartworm medications are failing or that the parasites are developing a resistance to the medicines. While conspiracy theorists love these types of thoughts, scientific evidence for either explanation is absent. Heartworm preventives possess a failure rate of less than 1 in 1 million doses. Likewise, the intricate life cycle of the heartworm does not lend itself to creating a natural resistance to the drugs. The truth quite possibly lies in the memory of the owner to administer the dose in a monthly manner and the global temperature.

Increasing temperatures in our climate has led to an extended mosquito season and a greater chance of transmission to our pets. Here in Houston, our mosquito season is all year round. Some locations are currently finding more mosquitoes in formerly mosquito-free areas. Irrigation of dry areas and increased plantings of trees in certain places might actually help to increase mosquito population. With a bigger number of mosquitoes, there is a greater chance of transmission of heartworm disease.

When all the facts are considered, the simplest reason for our failure to manage this lethal parasite falls on the humans themselves. We simply fail to give the preventive as we must. It may be attributable to forgetfulness, or perhaps one husband or wife assumed the other one gave it or even it may be as a consequence of economy along with the financial difficulties imposed on the family. Regardless of the rationale may very well be, it can bring about dire implications for the sake of our pets.

Fortunately, as pet owners, you do have powerful allies to help battle the war against heartworms. With the help of your veterinarian, you can select the ideal heartworm medication for your pet and your spending budget. Oral medications, for instance Heartgard, Sentinel, and Iverhart can be purchased. In addition there are topical medications for example Advantage-Multi and Revolution that are formulated to also protect your pet from both heartworms and fleas. Proheart 6 is additionally available as a long lasting injection. The prevention of this disease rests entirely on the pet's owners to ensure the pet will get the prevention before the pet might be exposed to the parasite. That means that this prevention must get started in puppy-hood and be supplied monthly, throughout the year.

Do not spend your time in search of "natural" or organic ways to prevent heartworms; they simply do not exist. Many people think they can formulate ivermectin to give to their pets, but incorrect dilution and storage can lead to overdosing or underdosing. Adhere to recommendations by your [veterinarian](#) and the American Heartworm Society ([www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org)) Your pet is relying on you and prevention is much better and much less expensive – a comparison to the treatment.

You can also find this article published on [Despite Available Prevention, Heartworm Disease Continues to Plague our Pets](#)