

Pimobendan

Pimobendan is a medication that has two separate effects on the heart. One of these is an increase in cardiac contractility, or the strength with which the heart pumps blood. It does this by allowing the heart to make more efficient use of calcium, which is central to the pumping activity of heart muscle. The second effect is relaxation of blood vessels. By allowing blood vessels to open more widely, it becomes easier for the heart to pump blood through them. Also, the additional space for fluid within the blood vessels may make it less likely for fluid to leak out of them and into the lungs or body cavities.

Pimobendan is a relatively newly employed medication in veterinary medicine, and is used to treat *congestive heart failure*. Congestive heart failure is characterized by excessive buildup of fluid within the body due to inefficient pumping activity of the heart. Eventually, this buildup becomes so great that fluid leaks out of blood vessels and into the lungs or body cavities. By causing the heart to pump more strongly, and by allowing blood vessels downstream of the heart to more easily accept blood, pimobendan may help to resolve heart failure and prevent or delay its recurrence.

Following initiation of therapy with pimobendan, followup appointments include diagnostic tests that assess response to treatment. Physical examination yields both objective (eg. rate of breathing) and subjective (eg. lung sounds heard with a stethoscope) information. Chest x-rays are obtained in order to confirm and document improvement or resolution of heart failure. An electrocardiogram and blood work may also be recommended, depending on the specific nature of your pet's condition and other medications being used.

Although details regarding frequency of occurrence await further study in dogs, arrhythmias (abnormalities in the electrical activity of the heart) may uncommonly occur as a side effect of pimobendan. Symptoms might include episodic weakness, fainting episodes, or even sudden death. It is also important to watch for signs of progressive heart failure, such as development or worsening of coughing, intolerance to exercise, rapid or labored breathing, or abdominal distension. If any of the above symptoms are noted, or if you have any questions or concerns, please call either your veterinarian or Veterinary Specialty Services immediately to discuss an appropriate plan.