

## **HEARTWORM**

by Dr. John Fudens

Heartworm is a disease spread by infected mosquitoes when they bite a dog and inject immature worms, called microfilaria, into the body. The microfilaria then circulate through the body tissue taking approximately six months to reach the right side of the dog's heart where they develop into adult heartworm. If the worms are both male and female, they breed and create new microfilaria, which circulate in the blood, waiting to be picked up by new mosquitoes that bite the dog. These new mosquitoes then suck the dog's blood, and spread the disease to uninfected dogs. The mosquito is thus the key to heartworm disease.

The symptoms of heartworm disease can include poor appetite, weight loss, listlessness, depression, coughing, gagging, shortness of breath, intolerance to exercise, and even collapse. Interestingly, the canine family is the only life form that develops the symptoms and the disease. Other life forms, including cats and humans, can be bitten and thus have microfilaria and even heartworm in the body, but the disease does not manifest like in the dog.

The conventional blood tests to detect heartworm disease include filtration to detect the microfilaria and an antigen test to detect the reaction of the immune system to the adult worms. The antigen test is the most sensitive because it measures the antibody titer of the body to the presence of adult heartworms. The filtration test detects microfilaria, however if the worms present in the heart of the dog are of only one sex, there will be no microfilaria and the blood test results are negative. For this reason, the antigen test is best.

Conventional treatment to prevent heartworm disease consists of an oral drug given monthly. The chemical then circulates in the blood of the dog, and when the microfilaria are injected into the body by an infected mosquito, they are killed. The best drug for this purpose is Ivermectin sold under various names including Heartguard, Have a Heart, Once a Month. Other drugs such as Heartguard Plus, Revolution, Sentinel, and Interceptor contain other chemicals/poisons for internal/external parasite control in addition to heartworm prevention. To administer a broader spectrum drug for health conditions that do not exist is to foolishly give your dog those unnecessary chemicals/poisons. And if a problem should arise, natural products that are less damaging to the body and the immune system are widely available. Of special note is that the Collie and Sheltie breeds are sensitive to Heartguard thus, you must consult with your veterinarian for alternatives.

Prevention of the disease is obviously the best route, but should your dog succumb to heartworm disease, veterinarians inject a form of arsenic directly into the bloodstream. Unfortunately, dogs can become seriously ill or even die from this expensive and toxic treatment. I use holistic therapies to both prevent and treat heartworm disease. Dogs can be vaccinated using a

homeopathic nosode to stimulate the immune system to attack the microfilaria and make the body resistant to the disease. There are no chemicals or poisons.

To treat heartworm disease, I focuses on a natural diet, glandulars, and herbs to repair and heal the physical body and the immune system. Certain homeopathic remedies and herbal extracts are also used to kill both the microfilaria and the adult worms. Again, there are no chemicals or poisons to harm or kill your dog, yet the treatment is very effective.

To help you decide on the best course of prevention and treatment of heartworm for your dog, please consider the following:

- 1) The female mosquito is the key because she must suck the blood of an infected dog before she can transmit the disease.
- 2) There are 6 stages of the heartworm cycle, yet the main considerations include a. the mosquito injecting microfilaria into your dog and of course, b. the presence of the adult worm in the heart.
- 3) It takes at least 6 months for the injected microfilaria to travel in your dog's body tissue to reach the heart, thus a negative blood test does not always mean your dog is not heartworm-infected.
- 4) The best treatment is prevention. The most popular approach given time, energy, and lifestyle is generally the use of the monthly Heartguard chewables and the annual blood test. If however, you would like to consider the more natural and healthier option of a homeopathic nosode, considerations include the overall health of your dog and your mosquito population. You may also elect to purchase natural mosquito-repellent spray products available for both you and your pet.
- 5) Keep in mind it is only the dog that can develop heartworm disease. In other life forms, the worms die in the lungs and never reach the heart. There are documented instances however of human beings diagnosed with tuberculosis or lung cancer when in reality, they suffered from encrypted heartworm larva.
- 6) Mosquito control is absolutely necessary for the successful prevention of heartworm disease. Standing water or other breeding grounds for mosquitoes must be eliminated from your home environment. Also, dogs should be walked in areas free of large mosquito populations if possible. Natural sprays, including those with citronella, are now widely available and can be used in and around your home.

Heartworm prevention requires effort on your part, and is not only better for your pet, but much easier, and more cost efficient for you, than treatment for heartworm disease. *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."*

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