

Baby is fifteen and a half years old and has begun to slow down quite a bit. She is a tiny mixed breed dog and used to be extremely active. She would run around her house and was especially active when the mailman would show up. For the last few months that has no longer been the case. It all started with coughing almost like she was choking and to the point where she would almost collapse during these episodes. Baby's caretaker Pauline took her to her veterinarian and she was diagnosed with congestive heart failure.

Therapy was initiated using three different medications to help with the heart failure and resulting consequences. For Baby, since fluid was found in her lungs on radiographs, one of the medications included a drug called furosemide to help pull that fluid out of the lungs and hopefully help stop the coughing. This type of drug is called a diuretic. She was also given two other medications to help the heart pump stronger and more efficiently. Cough suppressing tablets were also prescribed.

Pauline's concern at this point is that Baby is still coughing. She has given Baby's medications faithfully and she seems to be doing alright other than her persistent cough. Pauline realizes Baby is toward the end of her life and wants to make her as comfortable as possible and toward that end she questions if there is something else to be done about the cough.

Congestive heart failure can certainly manifest in dogs with coughing. The cause of the cough is often fluid in the lungs that results from back pressure in the blood vessels coming from the lungs to the heart. This back pressure results in leakage of fluid from the vessels into the lungs. The body's response to this fluid in the respiratory system is to cough to try to get rid of it. The furosemide drug Baby is taking will help remove the fluid through the kidneys and out in the urine. However, Baby is still coughing. Two thoughts come to mind as to why this might be the case.

It may be that there is still fluid accumulating in the lungs. This can easily be determined simply by returning Baby to her veterinarian's for repeat thoracic radiographs. If there is still fluid present in the lungs, another diuretic can be added to the drug regimen or perhaps just an increase in the amount of furosemide given.

The other distinct possibility for Baby's continued cough involves one of the changes within the heart that can occur with congestive heart failure. Due to the back pressure that occurs within the right side of the heart with congestive heart failure, one of the four chambers of the heart, the right atrium, will enlarge overtime. When it gets large enough, it will impinge on one of the breathing tubes, a main stem bronchus which supplies air to the lung. This impingement irritates the bronchus and causes the cough response. This is what I suspect is causing Baby's persistent cough. Unfortunately, there is no direct way to eliminate this cause.

Baby is already on the proper medications to try to help her heart function better and slow the increase in size of her right atrium. Cough suppressant medications can help with a cough associated with main stem bronchus impingement; however, as I stated, there is no direct way to eliminate that type of cough. There are several types that can be tried.

Have Baby re-evaluated at this point to determine the definitive cause for her continued cough and what if anything might be done to help her. I would suggest she have an echocardiogram performed which will allow a visual and objective look at how her heart is functioning and measure the chambers of her heart.