

Atrial Flutter

What is atrial flutter?

- Atrial flutter is a type of arrhythmia characterized by an abnormal circuit in the upper chambers (the atria) that continuously re-excites the heart, causing the heart to beat more rapidly and often in an irregular manner.

What causes atrial flutter?

- Atrial flutter is often secondary to increased stress, stretch, and scarring on the atrial muscle due to heart disease.

How is atrial flutter diagnosed?

- Definitive diagnosis is with an electrocardiogram (ECG).

When do we treat?

- The cardiologist will discuss if treatment is needed based on your pet's ventricular response rate (heart rate) to the atrial flutter and if there is also structural heart disease.
- Management with oral medication(s) is the most common way to manage atrial flutter, with the goal to control the overall heart rate.

Follow up plan:

- It is important to have follow up ECGs (+/- ambulatory 24 hour ECG termed a Holter monitor) and blood testing of some medication levels to assess if the management plan is working and to help make medication adjustments. The cardiologist may also discuss the options for at-home monitoring of the heart rate (see separate link/handout).
- One or more medications may be needed to control the heart rate. Frequent reevaluations of the heart rate are often needed during the initial phase of treatment until the desired heart rate is achieved, after which follow up intervals can be spread out.



Example of atrial flutter. Note the wavy/sawtooth baseline due to the rapid abnormal activation of the atria.