

Syncope



CVCA

Cardiac Care for Pets

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What is syncope (sin-co-pee)?

Syncope is **commonly known as fainting or passing out** and is the temporary loss of consciousness due to decreased blood flow to the brain. It occurs quickly, does not last long, and recovery is usually instant. These fainting events are often caused by abnormal blood flow to the brain usually caused by exercise, stress/startle, coughing/gagging, urination/defecation, or pain.

Before fainting, your pet can feel weakness in the rear legs or whole body, become off-balance/dizzy, and/or feeling dazed, confused, like “the lights are on, but no one is home.”

What are the signs of syncope?

- Falling over onto side with or without the stiffening of legs
- Whining or howling
- Arching of the head/neck backward
- Urination
- Quick recovery

What causes syncope?

Structural heart disease

- Blockage to blood flow through the heart
- A blockage or limiting of blood filling the heart normally. An example is fluid in the heart sac or a tumor inside the heart.
- Poor heart muscle function
- High blood pressure in the lungs

Abnormal heart rhythm

- Slow heart rate
- Rapid heart rate

Fainting due to the body not reacting normally to certain triggers (Reflex-Mediated Syncope)

- If your pet becomes overly excited or coughs a lot, it can cause a sudden drop in their heart rate and/or blood pressure. This in turn, decreases the blood flow to their brain and causes your pet to briefly faint.
- Rarely causes death.

Metabolic disorders - disease in other parts of the body (not a full list)

- Low number of red blood cells (anemia)
- Low blood sugar
- Diseases of adrenal glands

How is syncope treated?

Once the cause of the fainting is found, a treatment plan is designed based on the specific findings and needs of each patient. A veterinary cardiologist will discuss options with the family and work with the primary care veterinarian.

- For diseases due to the structure of the heart the options may be:
 - » Treat with medication to slow the heart rate and help improve blood flow through the heart
 - » Perform a minimally invasive surgical procedure to improve how well the valve is opening
- For fluid in the sac that surrounds the heart, options are:
 - » Remove the fluid in the heart sac to allow the heart to fill with blood normally
 - » Surgical procedure to remove the heart sac.
- If your pet's heart rate is too slow, he/she may need:
 - » Medications to increase the heart rate
 - » Pacemaker implantation
- For other causes of syncope:
 - » The most common treatment is medication



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