

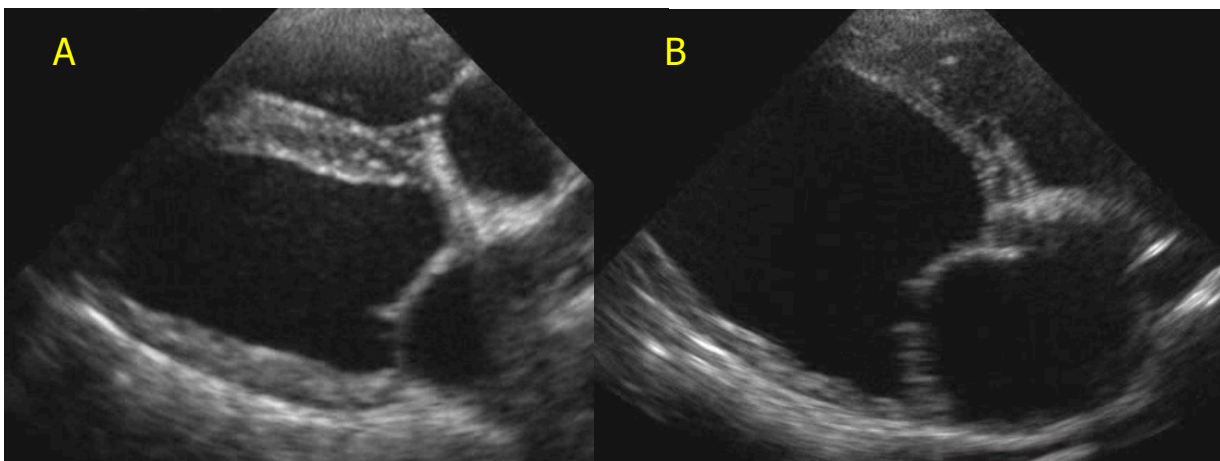
## Dilated Cardiomyopathy

Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) is a heart muscle condition that typically develops in large breed dogs. Doberman Pinschers are particularly predisposed. DCM leads to dilation and enlargement of the heart chambers as well as weakening of the pumping function of the heart. Dogs with advanced DCM often develop congestive heart failure (CHF) of one or both sides of the heart. This leads to fluid accumulation inside the lungs and, occasionally, within the belly. Common symptoms associated with CHF in these patients include a persistent cough, labored breathing, exercise intolerance, lethargy and fainting spells. Dogs with DCM may also experience sudden death due to lethal arrhythmias (irregular heartbeats).

DCM causes progressive weakening of heart function prior to the development of symptoms in affected dogs. This period of time is known as the “pre-clinical” or “occult” period. If DCM is diagnosed during this time, medications can be started to attempt to delay the onset of CHF. In Doberman Pinschers there is scientific evidence that proves a significant survival benefit to intervening with medications during this time. Once the disease progresses to the point of CHF, additional medications are needed to alleviate symptoms. Sadly, DCM often progresses quickly after patients develop CHF.

The diagnosis of DCM must be made using echocardiography (cardiac ultrasound). This test may be recommended after a pet is found to have a heart murmur, an irregular heartbeat, or heart enlargement on an x-ray. It may also be recommended as a screening test in Doberman Pinscher dogs due to their significant predisposition for developing DCM. The echocardiogram allows the cardiologist to assess heart size, check pumping function, look for leaking heart valves, and check for evidence of elevated pressures inside the heart or inside the blood vessels of the lungs. All of this information is used to establish a diagnosis, assess prognosis and help direct the treatment plan.

Many patients with DCM will also need to have an ECG if they are found to have cardiac arrhythmias. Additionally, x-rays of the chest may be required to determine whether a patient is accumulating fluid inside the lungs due to the development of CHF.



A: Echocardiographic image of a normal dog heart. B: Echocardiographic image of a weak, enlarged heart affected by DCM.