



Mr. Suede's Heart

By Cheryl Brady
Owner, Vet Care Express
Animal Ambulance

We received the call around 10:00 AM. Rian had noticed that her nine-year old Golden Retriever, Mr. Suede, "just wasn't acting right;" he was lethargic, not interested in playing, and not interested in food. So Rian made an 11:30 appointment with her veterinarian.

Because Mr. Suede was a large—and now lethargic—Golden, Rian knew that she would need the help of Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance to transport him to the vet. Concerned about Mr. Suede's symptoms, I told her that we would come right away, so that we could assess the situation and go to the vet early, if we needed to.

When we arrived at Rian's house, she had just gotten Mr. Suede to eat and had let him out into the backyard. We went outdoors and discovered that Mr. Suede had collapsed and was lying in his own

vomit. His gums were extremely pale with very little capillary refill response, and his level of consciousness was very low. Realizing his condition was critical, we immediately lifted him onto a stretcher, loaded him into the ambulance, administered oxygen and treated him for shock.

While closely monitoring his condition, we rushed him to Sarasota Veterinary Emergency and Specialty Center (SVESC). He immediately was examined by the critical care veterinarian. After his initial emergency physical exam, he was quickly moved to have an ultrasound of his heart.

Within just a couple of minutes of looking at Mr. Suede's heart, the diagnosis was confirmed—pericardial effusion and cardiac tamponade. An abnormally large amount of fluid had collected in the sac that surrounded the dog's heart. The swelling from this retention of fluid applied pressure on his beating heart, compressing it and restricting its ability to pump blood.

Pets with cardiac tamponade require urgent treatment—the excess fluid must be removed as soon as possible. Fortunately, Sarasota Veterinary Emergency and Specialty Center had the critical care vet, specialists, technicians and equipment to diagnose and treat Mr. Suede and, even more importantly, save his life, all right there in the veterinary emergency facility.

Within minutes of his diagnosis,



Cheryl Brady,
Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance
Photo by Connie Summers

Mr. Suede was undergoing pericardiocentesis, a procedure in which a catheter is placed through the chest wall to where the pericardial sac is most distended with fluid. An extension set with syringe and stopcock is attached to the catheter. Once the catheter reaches the pericardial sac, the fluid flows freely into the syringe, removing it from the pericardial sac.

Once the fluid was removed, Mr. Suede's condition improved immediately. His gums returned to bright pink, his level of consciousness greatly improved (He wanted to get down from the examining table!), his pulse strength improved and his heart rate dropped. In fact, he improved so much that within a half hour of arriving at SVESC in critical condition, he was up and trotting out to see "mom" in the waiting room.

"We are so grateful for Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance's quick response, and their ability to get him to the right place immediately," says Rian. "We can't thank Sarasota Veterinary Emergency enough for taking such good care of our Mr. Suede; his little brother, Woode, needs him!"

Once the initial crisis was resolved, Mr. Suede spent a comfortable night in the hospital, but next had to see a veterinary cardiologist to find the root cause of his pericardial effusion. Causes of pericardial effusion can either be masses or tumors on the heart (either cancerous or benign)



Above: Mr. Suede as a playful pup. At right: Mr. Suede and Woode, the best of friends and nearly inseparable, taking an afternoon snooze.

or idiopathic (unknown cause). In about 50 percent of the cases, the cause is a cancerous tumor on the heart, and the prognosis for long-term survival is not good. Unfortunately, Mr. Suede did have a tumor on his heart, so his family decided to take him home and keep him as happy and comfortable as possible.

With the fluid removed, Suede was back to his old self and enjoying all of his playtime with his new little brother, Woode, a seven-month-old Golden Retriever. During this time, Mr. Suede and Woode became even closer pals, and Mr. Suede continued to teach Woode "the ropes." Nobody knew how long it would be before Mr. Suede showed symptoms of pericardial effusion again, so under watchful and loving eyes, his family let him play and enjoy just being himself for as long as they could.

After three weeks, signs of weakness and lethargy began to appear again and determined to spare him from any suffering or pain, his family decided that it was time to let Mr. Suede be at peace. So, with breaking hearts, they let him go.

Even though the long-term prognosis was not good, Mr. Suede's family is so grateful for the extra time they were allowed to share with their dear, gentle friend.

"We are so thankful for the extra three weeks that Mr. Suede had to play and have fun with Woode; they had such a great time together, and Mr. Suede was so happy!" says Rian.

"Thanks to all of you for your timely, gentle and thoughtful care!" 🐾

Cheryl Brady is the owner of Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance, the first emergency animal ambulance transport service in Florida. For more information about Vet Care Express or to schedule a transport, please call 941-592-5131, or visit www.vetcareexpress.com.

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