

Facts about Pectus Excavatum

What is pectus excavatum?

Pectus excavatum is a birth defect in which a kitten's lower rib cage bends inward toward their heart and lungs. This gives their chest a sunken-in appearance that is usually detectable by the time the kitten is 10 days old. The deformity varies in severity, and it sometimes worsens as the kitten's skeleton matures.

What are the signs and symptoms of pectus excavatum?

The signs and symptoms vary depending on how severely a kitten is affected. Kittens with a mild deformity may show no symptoms at all. Those who are moderately to severely affected display symptoms associated with compression of their heart and lungs. These can include:

- Sleepiness or lack of energy
- Tiring easily or limited ability to run or play
- Fainting
- Difficulty breathing or rapid shallow breaths
- Reduced growth rate
- Bluish lips or gums

What causes pectus excavatum?

The exact cause of this skeletal abnormality is unknown, but it does appear to have a genetic component, as some purebred lines have higher than average instances of the disease. It is also thought to occur spontaneously in some kittens who are not genetically predisposed to it. There is currently no evidence of a contagious cause that could be transmitted between cats, to other animals, or to humans.

Treatment and Management

- Mildly affected kittens who have no symptoms require no treatment.
- In symptomatic kittens, a surgical procedure to pull the sternum outward from the chest is required. Surgery has a good success rate and immediately improves quality of life.
- Kittens without symptoms and those successfully treated through surgery have normal life expectancies.
- Cats with this deformity should not be bred.