Positioning a patient for accurate vertebral heart score measurement

Positioning is critical for accurate visualization of the heart

**Why patient positioning matters**

- Improper positioning can make the heart appear larger or smaller, depending on degree of rotation, and can cause cardiac chambers to appear abnormal and exaggerated in size.
- Failure to extend the forelimbs can cause poor visualization of the cranial cardiac border and cranial lung fields.
- Expiratory radiographs can mimic a diffuse pulmonary interstitial pattern.
- Improper positioning can generate misleading VHS values.

**Guidelines:**

- Place the patient in **right lateral recumbency** with no axial rotation
- Extend the **forelimbs forward**.
- Place the **head in a neutral position**.
- Take the radiograph as close to **peak inspiration** as possible.

Use weighted sandbags, foam wedges, and other positioning aids, as needed, to ensure correct positioning.

**Incorrect (left lateral) VHS:**

9.72

**Incorrect (rotated) VHS:**

10.08

**Correct (right lateral), VHS:**

10.31

**TIP:** Find the VHS tool under [ ] in the IDEXX Web PACS™ Advanced Viewer.

Correct positioning helps to ensure an accurate clinical picture and meaningful VHS values. Visit the IDEXX Learning Center for additional training modules on radiographic positioning.