Sleeping Respiratory Rates

A sleeping respiratory rate (SRR) simply refers to the number of breaths taken in one minute while asleep. A dog or cat without any cardiac or respiratory disease should have a SRR less than 30 breaths/minute.

How to count the SRR:

- With your pet sleeping/resting in a quiet and cool place, count the number of times the chest rises and falls
- One breath = one rise and one fall of the chest
- Record the number of breaths in 1-minute or in 30 seconds (and multiply by 2) to obtain the SRR

The most common reason for asking an owner to count their pet's sleeping respiratory rate is to monitor for the development of left-sided congestive heart failure in animals with underlying heart disease. Left-sided congestive heart failure causes accumulation of fluid in the lungs (pulmonary oedema) and when this occurs the SRR will progressively increase. SRR's are in fact the most powerful tool that pet owners have for monitoring their dog or cat's heart disease.

A couple of points worth mentioning:

- Once your veterinarian has asked you to monitor the SRR in your pet, this should be done daily on an indefinite basis. It is easy to get complacent, however it's vital this does not happen. A very important reason for monitoring SRR's is that it allows owners to detect early fluid accumulation (due to congestive heart failure). If SRR's are not closely monitored (or only occasionally), most owners will only notice a problem once the fluid accumulation is severe (which can be a life-threatening situation).
- Occasionally the SRR will transiently increase (and then settle after a while). An elevated SRR that spontaneously normalises (without any treatment) is not due to left-sided congestive heart failure (dreaming will often cause such a fluctuation in SRR).