

HEARTWORM HEALING FOR RESCUE DOGS

A Gentle, Science-Informed Guide for All Dogs
and the Humans Who Love Them



BY SAM CARTER

GUIDED BY ZURI AND ROXY

Organization & Educational Use Edition

For rescues, shelters, foster programs, and veterinary professionals

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Exception Nation Publishing

San Antonio, Texas

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Published by Exception Nation Publishing, San Antonio, Texas.
Printed in the United States of America.

First edition, 2026.

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- This license is written in the spirit of generosity. Its purpose is not to restrict access for the dogs and guardians who need this information most — it is to protect the integrity of the work, the story of Zuri and Roxy, and the sustainability of Exception Nation’s mission so that future editions can continue to reach the communities that need them.

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Dedication

For Roxy — Your life was short, but your impact was immeasurable. Your courage, your sweetness, and your quiet resilience continue to guide every word of this mission. Your love did not end; it transformed. It became purpose.

For Zuri — You are proof that healing is possible. You are proof that fear can soften, trust can grow, and a frightened dog can become a joyful soul when given safety, patience, and love. Your journey is the heartbeat of this guide.

For every dog ever overlooked, mislabeled, or misunderstood — You are not broken. You are not too much. You are not defined by a diagnosis. You deserve a chance, a home, and a life filled with gentleness.

And for the humans who choose compassion over convenience — Your courage to love a dog through fear, uncertainty, and healing is the quiet kind of heroism the world needs more of. Thank you for showing up. Thank you for staying.



Roxy proved life was measured in moments, and she was full of love.

“Healing begins the moment a dog feels safe enough to rest.”

— Sam Carter

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How to Use This Guide

Your Companion in Healing

This guide is designed to meet you wherever you are. You do not have to read it in order. Each chapter stands on its own, and each section within offers modular support you can return to as often as you need. If you prefer to jump between sections, open the bookmarks or Table of Contents panel in your PDF viewer.

Find What You Need Quickly

You don't have to read in order. Begin where you are. One steady step is enough.

- If you just got the diagnosis: Chapter 1.
- If you need guidance for the next 48 hours: Chapter 2.
- If you're choosing a treatment path: Chapters 3 and 4.
- If rest and activity rules feel hard: Chapter 5.
- If your dog is anxious (or you are): Chapter 6.
- If symptoms are worrying you: Chapter 7.
- If you are in the injection phase: Chapter 8.
- If you are retesting or moving forward: Chapter 9.
- If you need calm understanding without overwhelm: look for Heartworm Science, the Healing Framework, and Emotional Guidance throughout the guide.

You are not behind. You are not alone. You are doing more than you realize.

If You Need Reassurance

This guide is here to support you — gently, clearly, and without pressure — whenever you need it. It walks beside you from diagnosis to life after treatment. If you are unsure where to begin, start with Chapter 1 and move forward at your own pace.

Within and alongside the chapters, you will find supportive sections — stories, explanations, reminders, and reference material you can return to whenever you need grounding or clarity. This guide exists to support you, not to rush you.

There is no required path through this guide. Follow the chapters for structure, pause in the sections when you need reassurance, and trust yourself to use what helps most in the moment.

Begin Where You Are

If your heart feels heavy or your mind overwhelmed, start with the emotional support sections. If you need practical steps, the Healing Framework and the chapter-by-chapter guidance are here for you. Every dog's journey is unique — trust yourself to adapt the guidance to your situation.



Begin where you are. This guide will meet you there.

Navigate with Ease

The Table of Contents is designed to take you exactly where you want or need to be. Each chapter stands alone, so you can find what you need, when you need it, without pressure to read in order.

Personalize Your Path

The strategies in this guide are flexible. Take what feels right and makes sense, set aside what does not, and return as your dog's healing unfolds. Your intuition and your bond with your dog are powerful guides.

Seek Support, Not Perfection

This guide is not a substitute for veterinary care. Use it to ask better questions, understand your options, and feel more confident in your choices. You are not alone — support is always within reach.

Return Often

Healing is a journey, not a single moment. Each time you revisit a chapter, you may find new insights and renewed hope. Let this guide be a source of comfort, clarity, and encouragement whenever you need it.

Above All, Trust Love

Trust yourself. Trust your bond with your dog. You are already doing more than you realize, and this guide is here to support you every step of the way.

Mission

This guide exists for one purpose: to bring clarity, compassion, and calm to dog owners facing one of the most overwhelming diagnoses a pet can receive.

Heartworms create fear. Fear creates confusion. Confusion leads to rushed decisions, unnecessary panic, and emotional exhaustion. This guide is here to change that.

Our Mission

To empower dog owners with clear, emotionally grounded, science-informed guidance that supports both the dog and the human through every stage of heartworm healing.

What This Guide Stands For

Clarity over confusion

You deserve information that is simple, steady, and easy to understand — without pressure, judgment, or fear-based messaging.

Compassion over panic

Heartworm treatment is not just medical; it is emotional. This guide honors the bond between you and your dog and supports your wellbeing as much as theirs.

Choice over rigidity

There is no single “right” path. Every dog, every home, and every situation is different. This guide helps you make informed decisions that fit your reality.

Hope over helplessness

Heartworms are treatable. Dogs recover every day. Every dog's journey is different, and every dog deserves care, safety, and love.

What You Can Expect

- Clear explanations without medical overwhelm.
- Emotional support without minimizing your fear.
- Practical steps you can follow at your own pace.
- Guidance that respects your intuition and your dog's individuality.
- A steady voice that walks beside you, not above you.

At the Heart of This Mission

Your dog deserves safety, dignity, and a chance to heal. You deserve support, understanding, and a guide that helps you breathe again. This guide is here to offer both.

Disclaimers

This guide is designed to support you with clarity, compassion, and practical understanding as you navigate your dog's heartworm treatment. It is not a substitute for professional veterinary care, diagnosis, or medical instruction.

What This Guide Is Not

- It is not medical advice.
- It is not a replacement for your veterinarian's expertise.
- It is not a prescriptive treatment plan.
- It is not intended to diagnose, treat, or cure any condition.

Every dog is unique. Every case is different. Heartworm treatment requires individualized veterinary guidance based on your dog's health, history, and specific needs. Your input, thoughts, questions, and advocacy for your dog are to be praised. You likely know your pup better than anyone else, and that knowledge is valuable information for veterinary providers. If your provider does not or will not listen to your concerns, questions, and observations, there are others who will.

What This Guide Is

- A source of emotional grounding.
- A companion through uncertainty.
- A clear explanation of concepts that often feel overwhelming.
- A supportive framework to help you understand your options.

- A tool to help you ask informed questions and make confident decisions.

This guide is here to help you feel less alone, less afraid, and more empowered — not to replace the essential role of your veterinary team, but to stand beside you as you decide what course to take.

Your Veterinarian Is Your Primary Partner

Always consult your veterinarian before making decisions about:

- Treatment paths.
- Medications.
- Supplements.
- Activity levels.
- Nutrition changes.
- Symptom concerns.
- Retesting timelines.



Your veterinarian is your primary partner in your dog's care.

Your vet's guidance, combined with your intuition and your dog's needs, creates the safest and most effective healing plan. Your personal research can bring meaningful opportunities for healing. Out-of-the-box ideas are worth exploring — whatever can help and not hurt, ask about.

A Note on Personal Experience

This guide includes lived experience, emotional insight, and supportive practices that helped one dog heal. These experiences are shared to offer comfort and clarity — not to suggest that the same path is right for every dog.

Use what helps, whatever that means to you and your family. Adapt what fits. Set aside what does not. Your dog's journey is their own.

Above All

You are your dog's advocate, protector, and source of safety. This guide is here to support you — gently, clearly, and without pressure — as you walk this path together.

Introduction

Heartworm treatment begins long before the first dose of medication. It begins in the moment you hear the diagnosis — that sharp, sinking moment when fear rises, questions multiply, and your mind races ahead to every worst-case scenario.

If you are holding this guide, you have already taken the most important step: you are choosing clarity over panic, understanding over fear, and compassion over confusion.

This guide was created to walk beside you through every stage of the journey — not with pressure, not with medical jargon, but with steadiness, warmth, and the kind of clarity that helps you breathe again.

Why This Guide Exists

Heartworm information online is often overwhelming, contradictory, fear-based, and emotionally destabilizing. Dog owners deserve better. Your dog deserves better.

This guide offers a grounded, emotionally safe path through the noise. It blends simple explanations, supportive practices, lived experience, science-informed clarity, emotional steadiness, and practical steps you can follow at your own pace.

What You Will Learn

This guide will help you:

- Understand what a heartworm diagnosis really means.
- Choose a treatment path with confidence.

- Create a healing environment that protects your dog’s heart and lungs.
- Support your dog emotionally and physically.
- Manage activity safely.
- Recognize symptoms and know when to call your vet.
- Navigate setbacks without spiraling into fear.
- Prepare for retesting.
- Rebuild life after treatment.

Every chapter is designed to reduce fear, increase clarity, and help you feel capable — even on the hard days.

What You Will Not Find Here

- Medical directives.
- Pressure to choose one treatment path.
- Shaming language.
- Fear-based messaging.
- Complicated terminology.

This guide is not here to replace your veterinarian. It is here to help you understand your options, ask better questions, and feel emotionally grounded as you make decisions. It is here to tell you: you do not have to make a decision out of fear.

A Note About Your Dog

Your dog is not defined by this diagnosis. They are not fragile. They are not doomed. They are not “too much work.” They are a living, breathing being who needs safety, steadiness, and your presence — and you are already giving them that.

A Note About You

You are not expected to know everything. You are not expected to be perfect. You are not expected to navigate this alone. You are here, learning, caring, and showing up. That is what makes you a good dog parent.

Let this guide be your companion — a calm voice in the moments when fear tries to take over, and a steady hand as you walk your dog toward healing.

Fast Kill vs. Slow Kill: A Clear, Compassionate Comparison

Choosing a heartworm treatment path can feel overwhelming. You want to do what is safest. You want to do what is kind. You want to make the right decision — but the information online often feels contradictory, confusing, or fear-based.

This section offers a calm, simple comparison to help you understand the two primary approaches: Fast Kill and Slow Kill. It is not here to tell you what to choose. It is here to help you breathe, understand, and make a decision that fits your dog, your home, and your heart.

The Two Main Treatment Paths

1. Fast Kill (Melarsomine Injections)

This is the treatment many veterinarians recommend because it kills adult heartworms more quickly and reduces the overall time the worms remain in the heart and lungs.

Fast Kill typically includes:

- Doxycycline.
- Prednisone (sometimes).
- Strict activity restriction.
- A series of melarsomine injections.

Potential Benefits:

- Faster removal of adult worms.

- Shorter overall treatment timeline.
- Often considered the most predictable path.

Considerations:

- Requires strict rest.
- Can be emotionally challenging for active or anxious dogs.
- May feel intense for dogs with trauma histories.
- Involves injections that can be painful.

Fast Kill is often chosen for dogs who can tolerate the injections and whose guardians feel comfortable with the structure and intensity of the protocol.

2. Slow Kill (Monthly Preventative Plus Doxycycline)

Slow Kill uses monthly heartworm prevention and doxycycline to weaken and gradually eliminate adult worms over time.

Slow Kill typically includes:

- Monthly heartworm preventative.
- Doxycycline cycles.
- Long-term activity management.

Potential Benefits:

- Gentler on dogs with fear, trauma, or medical fragility.
- Avoids melarsomine injections.
- Can feel emotionally safer for some guardians.
- Allows more flexibility in daily life.

Considerations:

- Takes longer.

- Requires regular veterinary follow-up or periodic testing over time.
- Adult worms remain in the body for a longer period.
- Not recommended by all veterinarians.

Slow Kill is often chosen for dogs who cannot safely undergo melarsomine or for guardians who need a gentler, more emotionally manageable approach.

What Both Paths Have in Common

Regardless of which path you choose:

- Your dog can heal.
- Your dog can live a full, joyful life.
- Your dog needs calm, consistency, and emotional safety.
- Supportive care makes a meaningful difference.
- Your presence is part of the medicine.

There is no “easy” path — but there is a path that fits your dog’s needs and your capacity.

How to Choose the Right Path for Your Dog

Here are gentle questions to guide your decision:

- What does my veterinarian recommend, and why?
- What feels emotionally manageable for my dog?
- What feels emotionally manageable for me?
- Does my dog have trauma, fear, or medical sensitivities?
- What level of activity restriction can my home realistically support?
- What timeline feels safest and most sustainable?

Your intuition matters. Your dog’s personality matters. Your home environment matters. There is no one-size-fits-all answer — only the answer that honors your dog and your reality.

At-a-Glance Comparison

This chart offers a side-by-side view to support calm, informed decision-making.

Aspect	Fast Kill (Melarsomine / Immiticide®)	Slow Kill (Alternative / Supportive)
Goal	Rapidly kill adult heartworms	Gradually reduce heartworm load
Medication	Melarsomine injections	Monthly preventatives, doxycycline, supportive care
Duration	2–3 months (intensive)	6–24 months (gradual)
Side Effects	Pain, swelling, lethargy, coughing, fever, GI upset; risk of embolism	Usually minimal; rare mild coughing or digestive upset
Activity Restriction	Strict	Moderate
Cost	Higher upfront	Lower upfront
Emotional Impact	High stress for dog and owner	Gentler
Recommended For	Advanced cases	Mild or moderate cases; dogs needing a gentler approach
Risks	Injection-site reactions reported in ~30% of treated dogs (32.8% in clinical field trials); mortality reported as 5.2% (Class 1–2) and 18.2% (Class 3) in clinical field trials	Prolonged infection; resistance possibility

Aspect	Fast Kill (Melarsomine / Immiticide®)	Slow Kill (Alternative / Supportive)
Sources	AHS, FDA-submitted clinical outcome studies, veterinary package inserts (Diroban®, Immiticide®), clinical field trial data	Veterinary parasitology studies; peer-reviewed studies

A Gentle Reminder

The figures shared here come from controlled clinical trials and cannot predict how any individual dog will respond. Every dog is unique, and your veterinarian is the best partner in evaluating risk based on your dog’s specific health profile.

The Heart of This Section

You are not choosing between “good” and “bad.” You are choosing between two valid paths, each with its own rhythm, structure, and emotional considerations.

Whatever you choose: you are not failing, you are not harming your dog, you are not alone, and you are doing your best with the information you have. And that is enough.

Activity Restrictions by Treatment Path

A Clear, Compassionate Guide to Activity Management

Heartworm treatment always involves some level of activity restriction. This is not punishment, and it is not about taking joy away — it is about protecting your dog’s heart and lungs while healing happens.

The degree and duration of restriction depends on the treatment path chosen. Understanding these differences helps you make informed decisions that fit your dog, your home, and your emotional capacity.

Restrictions are not a sign that your dog is fragile. They are a temporary act of protection — rooted in science, compassion, and respect for your dog’s dignity.

Fast Kill (Melarsomine / Immiticide®): Strict, Short-Term Activity Restriction

Fast Kill eliminates adult heartworms quickly. Because many worms die over a shorter period of time, strict activity restriction is essential to reduce the risk of complications.

What “Strict” Means

During the Fast Kill phase, activity restriction is nonnegotiable and closely monitored. This typically includes:

- No running, jumping, or rough play.
- Leash walks for bathroom breaks only.
- No stairs if avoidable.

- No excitement-driven activities (door greetings, visitors, play with other dogs).
- No elevated heart rate activities.
- Extended periods of rest and calm.

This level of restriction is especially important after melarsomine injections, during the “quiet month” following injections, and when coughing, lethargy, or inflammation is present.

Why It Matters

When adult worms die, they break down inside the blood vessels of the heart and lungs. Increased heart rate and blood flow can increase the risk of complications during this phase.

Strict rest allows the body to clear dying worms safely, reduce strain on the cardiovascular system, and heal inflammation without added stress.

Emotional Considerations

Strict restriction can be emotionally challenging, especially for active dogs, anxious dogs, dogs with trauma histories, and guardians who struggle with confinement.

Extra emotional support, calm enrichment, and predictable routines are essential during this phase. This intensity is temporary, but it does require preparation and commitment.

Slow Kill (Monthly Preventative + Doxycycline): Moderate, Long-Term Activity Management

Slow Kill reduces heartworm load gradually over time. Because adult worms die more slowly, activity management is still important, but restrictions are usually less intense and more flexible.

What “Moderate” Means

Slow Kill does not mean unrestricted activity. It means intentional, sustained calm over a longer period. This typically includes:

- Controlled leash walks (no running or pulling).
- Avoiding bursts of excitement.
- No intense exercise or endurance activity.
- No high-energy play sessions.
- Calm, predictable routines.
- Ongoing awareness of breathing, fatigue, and stress.

Some dogs may tolerate gentle daily movement better with Slow Kill, but activity is still managed — not a free-for-all.

Why It Matters

Even though worms die more slowly, they are still present in the heart and lungs for a longer time. Overexertion can still increase strain and inflammation.

Consistent, moderate restriction protects the heart over time, reduces cumulative stress, and supports long-term healing.

Emotional Considerations

Slow Kill is often chosen for dogs with fear, trauma, or anxiety; medically fragile dogs; guardians who need a gentler emotional pace; and homes where strict confinement is not realistic.

While the timeline is longer, many guardians find this path more emotionally manageable.

Trauma-Sensitive Dogs: A Special Note

Some dogs enter heartworm treatment carrying more than a medical diagnosis. Rescue dogs, dogs with neglect or abuse histories, and dogs who have lived in chronic survival mode may experience restriction itself as stressful or destabilizing if it is not handled with care.

This does not mean these dogs cannot heal. It means their healing requires extra emotional intention.

Restriction must be paired with emotional safety. Calm is not just physical stillness — it is nervous-system regulation.

Helpful support may include:

- Predictable daily routines.
- Quiet, consistent spaces to rest.
- Gentle, choice-based interaction.
- Calm enrichment that does not elevate heart rate.
- Reduced environmental triggers (noise, visitors, sudden changes).
- A steady, regulated human presence.

Fast Kill considerations for trauma-sensitive dogs: strict confinement can feel overwhelming for dogs who associate restriction with fear or loss of control. Extra planning, emotional support, and creative calming strategies may be needed to help them settle safely during this phase.

Slow Kill considerations for trauma-sensitive dogs: the gentler pace and flexibility of Slow Kill can feel more emotionally manageable for some trauma-affected dogs, even though activity still needs to be intentionally controlled.

Neither choice is “right” or “wrong.” The goal is safety — physical and emotional — at the same time. Healing is not only about what happens in the body. It is also about what the dog feels in their environment. A dog who feels safe heals more smoothly.

What Both Paths Have in Common

Regardless of treatment choice:

- Some level of activity restriction is always required.
- Calm routines support healing.
- Emotional regulation matters.
- Your presence and steadiness are part of the treatment.
- Restrictions are temporary — healing is the goal.

Think of restrictions not as limitation, but as creating the safest possible environment for your dog’s body to do its work.

A Gentle Reminder

There is no “easy” path — only the path that fits your dog and your reality. Strict does not mean cruel. Moderate does not mean careless. Slower does not mean unsafe. Faster does not mean reckless.

Your job is not to be perfect. Your job is to protect your dog — with love, intention, and informed care. And you are already doing that.

With this understanding in place, we now return to the heart of this guide — the story that shaped its compassion, purpose, and commitment to healing.

Roxy's Tribute

Some dogs change your life quietly. They don't arrive with fanfare or certainty. They arrive with need — and with a softness that asks nothing more than to be seen, held, and loved.

Roxy was that kind of dog.

She came into this world with challenges no animal should face, yet she carried herself with a gentleness that made every moment with her feel sacred. Her time was short, but her impact was immeasurable. She taught lessons that linger long after her paws left the earth.



Roxy, whose legacy taught us that love and healing are measured in moments, not years.

Roxy's Legacy

Roxy showed that healing is not always measured in years — sometimes it's measured in moments:

- the first time she felt safe enough to rest
- the first time she trusted a hand reaching toward her
- the first time she walked without fear
- the first time she understood she was loved

These moments were small, but they were everything. They were victories. They were proof that love leaves a mark deeper than time.

What Roxy Taught

Roxy taught that:

- fragile does not mean weakness
- quiet does not mean invisible
- short lives can have long echoes
- love given freely becomes legacy

She reminded us that every dog — no matter their past, their fear, or their diagnosis — deserves a chance to feel safe, to be understood, and to be loved without condition.

Why She Lives in This Guide

Roxy's story is woven into these pages because she is the reason this mission exists. Her life sparked the commitment to help other dogs who arrive scared, sick, or overlooked. Her memory fuels the compassion behind every chapter.

This guide is not just information. It is a promise — a promise that dogs like Roxy will not be forgotten, and that their stories will continue to inspire healing for others.

A Love That Continues

Roxy may no longer be here in body, but she is here in purpose. She is here in every dog who gets a second chance. She is here in every guardian who chooses compassion over fear. She is here in every act of gentleness offered to a dog who needs it.

Her life was short. Her love was vast. Her legacy is alive.

Zuri's Rescue Story

Some dogs arrive in our lives like a whisper — quiet, unsure, carrying more history than anyone will ever fully know.

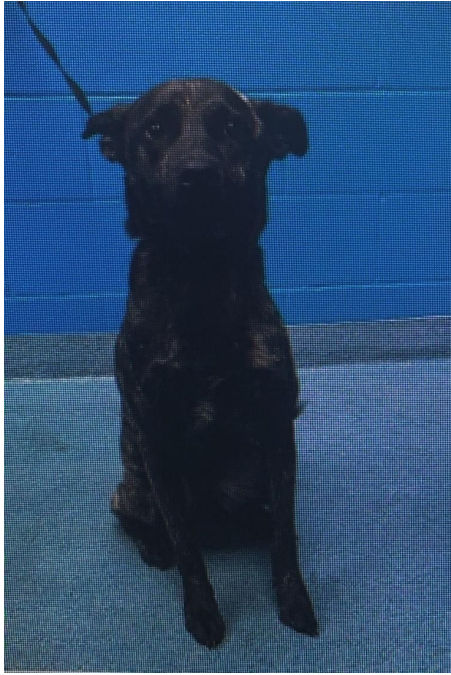
Zuri was one of those dogs. She didn't come bounding into her new life with confidence. She came with caution. With fear. With the kind of softness that only appears in dogs who have survived more than they can say.

But beneath that fear was something else — something steady, something brave, something waiting for a chance.

Before Safety, There Was Survival

Before she was rescued, Zuri lived in a world where survival came before comfort. She ate whatever she could find — bugs, lizards, even bees. She slept lightly, always alert. She moved through life expecting danger, not kindness.

Her body carried the signs of that life. So did her heart. When she arrived in rescue, she was heartworm-positive, underweight, and emotionally fragile.



This is where it started for Zuri. She was almost out of time.

But she was also gentle. Curious. Quietly hopeful. She didn't know it yet, but her life was about to change.

The First Days of Healing

When Zuri entered her forever home, she didn't trust the softness of a bed. She didn't understand that food would come every day. She didn't know that hands could be gentle. But she learned. Slowly. Tenderly. Moment by moment.

She learned that:

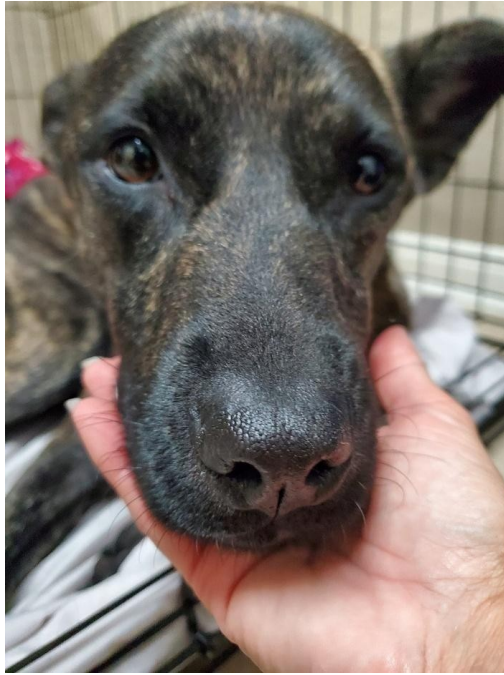
- voices could be soft
- routines could be predictable
- meals could be nourishing
- humans could be safe

- rest could be deep
- love could be steady



Her first real sleep in three days — safety finally reached her body.

Her healing didn't happen all at once. It happened in layers — emotional, physical, and relational.



The first night of her new life.

The Diagnosis That Changed Everything

Zuri tested positive for heartworms at the intake shelter. For larger dogs at shelters that euthanize, an additional factor like heartworms can tragically shorten their time — larger dogs typically take longer to adopt, and adding a medical condition can close that window even further.

Zuri's diagnosis was heavy — not because she was fragile, but because she had already survived so much. The thought of losing her was unbearable, especially after the loss of Roxy.

But heartworms were not the end of her story. They were the beginning of a new chapter — one filled with clarity, intention, and unwavering commitment.

Her healing became a partnership:

- her courage
- her guardian’s steadiness
- her veterinarian’s guidance
- her environment’s safety
- her nutrition’s support
- her routine’s predictability

Together, these pieces formed the foundation of her recovery.

The Transformation

As the weeks passed, Zuri changed. Her eyes softened. Her breathing steadied. Her tail began to move — first in small, hesitant wags, then in full, joyful sweeps. She slept deeply, ate eagerly, and leaned into the hands she once feared.

Her body healed. Her heart healed. Her spirit healed. She became the dog she was always meant to be — not defined by her past, but shaped by love, safety, and second chances.

Why Her Story Matters

Zuri’s journey is woven into this guide because she represents every dog who:

- arrives scared
- arrives sick
- arrives misunderstood
- arrives overlooked
- arrives needing patience more than perfection

Her story is proof that healing is possible — not just physically, but emotionally. It is proof that rescue dogs are resilient. It is proof that

love, consistency, and compassion can transform a life.

Zuri is not just the inspiration for this guide. She is its heartbeat.

Heartworm Science: A Clear, Compassionate Overview

Heartworms can feel terrifying when you first hear the diagnosis — the word alone carries weight. But when you understand what heartworms actually are, how they behave, and how treatment works, the fear begins to soften.

Clarity brings calm. Calm brings confidence. And confidence helps you support your dog with steadiness instead of panic.

This section offers a simple, emotionally grounded explanation of heartworms — without medical overwhelm, without fear-based language, and without unnecessary complexity.

What Heartworms Are

Heartworms are long, thin parasites that live in the heart, lungs, and nearby blood vessels. They spread through mosquito bites and grow slowly over time. Most dogs show very few symptoms in the early stages, which is why many guardians are shocked when they hear the diagnosis.

Heartworm disease is only transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Not all mosquitoes carry heartworm, and the disease cannot be spread by direct contact between animals or from animals to humans.

— *American Heartworm Society, Veterinary Partner, PetMD*

Heartworms do not appear overnight. They do not mean you failed your dog. They do not mean your dog is beyond help. They simply mean your dog needs support, structure, and a clear treatment.

How Heartworms Affect the Body

Heartworms can cause:

- inflammation in the heart and lungs
- increased strain on circulation
- coughing or fatigue in some dogs
- changes in breathing during exertion

But here's the part most people don't realize: many heartworm-positive dogs show no outward symptoms at all. They eat normally. They play normally. They act like themselves. This is why an early diagnosis often feels confusing — your dog may look perfectly fine.

Why Treatment Works

Heartworm treatment works because it targets the worms at multiple stages:

- doxycycline weakens the bacteria the worms rely on
- preventatives stop new worms from developing
- melarsomine (Fast Kill) eliminates adult worms
- time and rest protect the heart and lungs as the worms die

Treatment is not instant, but it is effective. Dogs recover every day — including dogs who were sicker than yours.

Why Activity Restriction Matters

When worms die, they break down inside the body. This is normal. When heartworm treatment begins, your dog's healing is not just a medical process — it is an emotional journey. The guidance here honors both the wellbeing of your dog and your own humanity, blending trauma-informed psychology, ethical decision-making, and practical clarity.

Think of restriction not as a rule, but as a gentle act of protection, rooted in compassion and respect for your dog's dignity.

Understanding Activity Restriction and Treatment Nuances

Activity restriction is one of the most important — and most misunderstood — parts of heartworm healing. It is not about deprivation or fear; it is about creating a safe, calm environment where your dog's body can heal without unnecessary risk.

This is especially important during the Fast Kill (melarsomine) protocol, which requires a period of strict rest as the adult worms die off. For dogs who are naturally very active, anxious, or have a history of trauma, this phase can be particularly challenging. These dogs may find it harder to settle, and the emotional demands on both guardian and pet can be greater.

Taking time to research which path (or combination of paths) best fits your dog and family is critically important. Extra patience, creativity, and support may be needed to help them feel safe and regulated during this time.

By following these recommendations, you are offering your dog the best chance for recovery, grounded in science and guided by love. The restrictions that follow are not meant to limit joy, but to protect your dog's heart and lungs while healing unfolds.

How Activity Restriction Protects the Heart and Lungs

When heartworms are treated, the worms begin to break down inside the body. Too much movement can increase the risk of complications because it raises heart rate and blood flow. If a dog is too active, fragments from the dying worms may travel into the lungs, which can lead to coughing, breathing difficulty, or, in rare cases, a pulmonary embolism.

Even dogs who seem comfortable or energetic can still be at risk, so maintaining a calm environment is important throughout the treatment period.

How to Prevent Complications

- **Strict rest:** recommended for the injection “Fast Kill” method with virtually no exceptions, sometimes for weeks. Limit activity to very slow, short leash walks for bathroom breaks only. Avoid running, jumping, playing, or any excitement that could raise heart rate.
- **Create a calm environment:** set up a quiet, comfortable space for your dog to rest away from household commotion, visitors, or other pets.
- **Predictable routines:** keep daily routines gentle and consistent to help your dog feel secure and reduce anxiety-driven bursts of energy.
- **Mental enrichment:** offer safe, low-energy activities like food puzzles, snuffle mats, or gentle chew toys to keep your dog’s mind engaged without physical exertion.
- **Monitor closely:** watch for signs of coughing, difficulty breathing, lethargy, or sudden changes in behavior. Contact your veterinarian if anything concerns you.

- Follow veterinary guidance: the rest period may extend for several weeks or longer, depending on your dog’s needs and response to treatment. Always follow your veterinarian’s advice on when and how to gradually reintroduce activity.

Your dog doesn’t need to be immobilized — just protected from bursts of excitement or exertion. Calm routines, gentle movement, and emotional steadiness are all part of the healing process.

Common Myths, Gently Clarified

Myth 1: “Heartworms are a death sentence.”

They are not. With treatment, patience, and time, the odds are mostly on your side. Treatment works. Dogs recover. Your dog can live a full, joyful life.

Myth 2: “My dog looks fine, so the diagnosis must be wrong.”

Most heartworm-positive dogs show no symptoms early on. This is normal.

Myth 3: “Treatment is too dangerous.”

Untreated heartworms are far more dangerous. Treatment is structured, monitored, and designed to protect your dog.

Myth 4: “I must choose the same treatment path as everyone else.”

Every dog is different. Every home is different. Your path should fit your dog’s needs and your capacity.

The Heart of This Section

Understanding heartworms removes fear. Understanding treatment builds confidence. Understanding your dog’s needs helps you show up with steadiness instead of panic.

Your dog is not fragile. Your dog is not doomed. Your dog is not defined by this diagnosis. They can heal — and you are capable of guiding them through it.

The Heartworm Healing Framework

Supportive Diet & Nutrition for Heartworm Healing

Why Nutrition Matters During Heartworm Treatment

Heartworm healing isn't just about medication or activity restrictions — it's about supporting your dog's entire body as it works through inflammation, stress, and recovery. Nutrition becomes one of the gentlest, most accessible ways to help your dog feel better, stay stable, and build resilience during treatment.

A supportive diet can help:

- reduce inflammation
- stabilize energy
- support immune function
- maintain muscle and healthy weight
- improve digestion during stress
- promote calmer behavior through predictable routines

Nutrition won't kill heartworms — but it can make the healing journey gentler, safer, and more comfortable.

Every dog is different. Every case is different. Use this chapter as a guide, not a prescription — and always talk with your veterinarian about what feels right for your dog.

Supportive Diet Principles

Keep Meals Predictable. Dogs in treatment thrive on routine. Predictable mealtimes reduce stress and help regulate digestion.

Choose Gentle, Digestible Foods. High-quality home-cooked or certain raw diets are sometimes preferred over kibble that may be harder to digest. Many dogs do well with simple proteins (chicken, turkey, white fish, beef) and easy-to-digest carbohydrates (rice, oats, sweet potato).

Prioritize Anti-Inflammatory Ingredients. These foods can support the body's natural healing processes:

- omega-3-rich fish (salmon, sardines)
- leafy greens (spinach, kale, finely chopped)
- blueberries
- turmeric (tiny amounts only, if approved by your vet)

Support the Gut. A calm gut supports a calm nervous system. Many owners use plain pumpkin, vet-approved probiotics, and low-sodium bone broth.

Keep Hydration Steady. Hydration supports circulation and helps the body manage inflammation. Bone broth, wet food, or adding warm water to meals can help.

Foods That Often Help Dogs Feel Better

- boiled chicken or turkey
- white fish
- sweet potato
- pumpkin
- rice or oats
- scrambled eggs (no oil or seasoning)
- bone broth
- steamed vegetables (green beans, carrots, spinach)

These are not cures — they are comfort.

Foods to Avoid During Treatment

Not because they are “bad,” but because they can increase inflammation or stress the body:

- high-fat foods
- heavily processed treats
- anything that causes digestive upset
- new foods introduced too quickly
- raw diets during treatment (due to immune stress)

If your dog is already on a raw diet and doing well, talk to your veterinarian before making changes.

A Simple Supportive Meal Example

This is not a prescription — just a gentle example that many dogs tolerate well:

- 1 part lean protein (chicken, turkey, or fish)
- 1 part easy carbohydrate (rice or sweet potato)
- 1 small spoon of pumpkin
- a splash of warm bone broth
- optional: a sprinkle of chopped greens

This creates a warm, soothing, low-stress meal that supports digestion and comfort.

Zuri’s Home-Cooked Superfood Blend

Zuri’s healing was supported by a homemade protein-and-vegetable blend alongside high-quality dehydrated food. Meals are prepared in batches, pressure-cooked for nutrient retention, and portioned for convenience.

Sample Recipe (approximately 98 calories per ½ cup, ~14 g protein):

- 4–5 chicken breasts (sometimes with a thigh or two, or ground turkey)
- 2–3 large sweet potatoes, cut
- 5–7 large carrots, cut
- ½–¾ bag frozen broccoli (12 oz)
- 1 bag frozen green beans (12 oz)
- 1 zucchini, if handy

Instructions:

- Pressure cook chicken on high with 2 cups water for 15 minutes (or until 165 °F). Release steam carefully.
- Remove chicken, add ½ cup water, layer sweet potatoes and remaining vegetables, and pressure cook 9–12 minutes.
- Chop chicken finely and blend with vegetables.
- Portion and freeze as needed.

How to Talk to Your Veterinarian About Nutrition

Use this gentle script if you want clarity without pressure:

“I want to support my dog’s body during heartworm treatment. Are there any foods or supplements you recommend or want me to avoid?”

You can also ask:

- Is my dog’s current diet appropriate for treatment?
- Would a gently cooked diet help reduce inflammation?
- Are probiotics or omega-3s safe for my dog?

- Is there anything I should watch for in their appetite or digestion?

Your veterinarian's guidance + your intuition = the right path.

Signs Your Dog's Diet Is Supporting Healing

You may notice:

- calmer energy
- more consistent appetite
- improved digestion
- softer coat
- steadier mood
- better sleep

These are small but meaningful signs that your dog's body feels supported.

When to Adjust the Diet

Make gentle adjustments if you see:

- digestive upset
- refusal to eat
- sudden pickiness
- vomiting or diarrhea
- increased anxiety around meals

These are signals to simplify, slow down, or check in with your veterinarian.

The Heart of This Chapter

Nutrition is not about perfection. It's about comfort, stability, and supporting your dog's body and spirit while they heal. Your dog doesn't need a complicated diet — they need a predictable, soothing one. And you're already doing more than enough.

The Five Pillars of Heartworm Healing

By breaking the process into clear, manageable stages, the path becomes far less intimidating. This framework is designed to help you understand the journey ahead, reduce emotional overwhelm, and support your dog with confidence and compassion.

This is not a rigid checklist. It is a flexible, supportive structure you can adapt to your dog's needs and your home's reality.

1. Safety & Stability

Before anything else, your dog needs to feel safe — physically and emotionally. This includes:

- predictable routines
- calm environments
- gentle handling
- reduced stress
- consistent feeding and rest

A regulated dog heals more smoothly. A regulated guardian does, too. Safety is the foundation of everything that follows.



Safety and stability — the foundation of healing.

2. Veterinary Partnership

Your veterinarian is your primary guide through treatment. Choosing a veterinarian who has your pet and your best interest at heart is one of the most important decisions you can make. If you do not feel that way, then look for one who fits.

This pillar includes:

- choosing a treatment path
- understanding medications
- scheduling injections, preventatives, or other means of treatment
- monitoring symptoms
- asking questions without fear

You don't need to know everything. You just need a vet you trust and a willingness to advocate for your dog.

3. Activity Management

Why Activity Management Is a Pillar (Not Just a Rule)

Activity management is where love becomes visible in the smallest choices — not because movement is “bad,” but because your dog's body is doing invisible work. When heartworm treatment begins, the heart and lungs carry more than they can explain, and that makes calm a form of protection, not a limitation.

This pillar deserves more space because it is the place where fear and responsibility most often collide. A guardian can understand the diagnosis, choose a treatment path, and still feel shaken by the daily question: “Am I doing enough — or doing too much?”

The answer is not perfection. The answer is steadiness — a simple structure that lowers risk without shrinking dignity.

So we start with the simplest truth: avoid sudden spikes, protect the lungs, and let rest do its quiet work. And then — only because clarity reduces panic — we go deeper. The pages that follow are not here to overwhelm you; they are here to give you control, so you can act with confidence instead of guessing. Take what helps today. Leave what doesn't. Return when you're ready.

If your mind feels flooded, you have permission to pause here. Nothing in the next section requires urgency unless your veterinarian tells you it does — and this guide will never ask you to sprint through fear.

This is one of the most important — and most misunderstood — parts of heartworm healing. Activity management means:

- preventing bursts of excitement
- avoiding strenuous exercise
- keeping routines calm
- using enrichment that doesn't elevate heart rate

It does not mean your dog must be frozen in place. It means you're protecting their heart and lungs while the worms die. Calm is medicine.

4. Emotional Support

Heartworm treatment is not just physical — it is deeply emotional for both dog and guardian. This pillar includes:

- grounding techniques for anxious moments
- soothing routines
- gentle reassurance
- recognizing signs of stress
- supporting your own emotional wellbeing

Your dog feels your energy. When you are steady, they become steadier.

5. Healing Environment

Your home becomes part of the treatment plan. A healing environment includes:

- soft places to rest
- reduced triggers
- quiet spaces
- predictable rhythms
- safe enrichment

- emotional warmth

You don't need a perfect home. You just need a home where your dog can exhale.

The Heartworm Healing Arc

Heartworm treatment unfolds in stages.

At a Glance: The Heartworm Healing Journey

Stage 1 — Diagnosis & Stabilization: breathe, gather clear information, choose a treatment path, and begin calm, predictable routines.

Stage 2 — Medication & Preparation: start medications or preventatives, adjust daily rhythms, and prepare your home for rest and healing.

Stage 3 — Activity Restriction & Monitoring: prioritize calm rest, limit exertion, watch symptoms without panic, and stay steady and consistent.

Stage 4 — Recovery & Retesting: retest as directed, gradually reintroduce activity, and rebuild confidence, strength, and trust.

Stage 5 — Life After Heartworms: return to normal life with relief, gratitude, and a deeper bond than before.

Every stage is supported by the same five pillars: Safety & Stability • Veterinary Partnership • Activity Management • Emotional Support • Healing Environment.



Healing starts from the moment her body could rest and she could just relax.

Understanding these stages helps you stay grounded and prepared.

Stage 1 — Diagnosis & Stabilization

You learn the diagnosis. You gather information. You choose a treatment path. You begin creating a calm, predictable environment.

Stage 2 — Medication & Preparation

Your dog starts doxycycline and/or preventatives. You adjust routines. You prepare for injections (if doing Fast Kill). You begin emotional support practices.

Stage 3 — Activity Restriction & Monitoring

This is the heart of treatment. Your dog rests. You watch for symptoms. You maintain calm days and gentle nights. You support their emotional needs.

Stage 4 — Recovery & Retesting

The worms die. Your dog's body clears them. You retest. You gradually reintroduce activity. You rebuild confidence and strength.

Stage 5 — Life After Heartworms

Your dog returns to normal life — often healthier, happier, and more connected to you than ever before. This stage is full of joy, relief, and gratitude.

The Heart of This Section

You do not need to be perfect. You do not need to know everything. You do not need to walk this path alone.

With structure, clarity, and compassion, heartworm treatment becomes manageable — even meaningful. Your dog is capable of healing. You are capable of guiding them. This framework is here to support you both.

Emotional Guidance for the Heartworm Journey

Heartworm treatment is not just a medical process — it is an emotional one. The diagnosis can shake you. The restrictions can frustrate you. The waiting can exhaust you. The fear can follow you into quiet moments when you least expect it.

This section is here to help you stay grounded, steady, and connected to your dog through every stage of the journey. Your emotional wellbeing is not separate from your dog's healing — it is part of it.

The Emotional Truth of Heartworm Treatment

You will feel afraid at times. This is normal. Fear is a sign of love, not failure.

You will feel uncertain. This is also normal. Heartworm treatment involves waiting, and waiting invites doubt.

You may feel overwhelmed. You are carrying responsibility, hope, and worry all at once.

You may feel guilty. Almost every dog guardian does — even when they did nothing wrong.

You may feel alone. But you are not. Millions of dogs have gone through this. Millions of guardians have felt what you're feeling.

Your emotions are not a problem to fix. They are a natural response to caring deeply.

What Your Dog Needs From You Emotionally

Your dog does not need perfection. Your dog does not need constant confidence. Your dog does not need you to hide your feelings.

Your dog needs:

- your presence
- your steadiness
- your predictability
- your calm voice
- your gentle routines
- your willingness to slow down

Dogs read energy more than words. When you breathe, they breathe. When you soften, they soften. Your emotional regulation becomes part of their treatment.

How to Stay Grounded During Treatment



Staying grounded together — calm guardians create calmer dogs.

1. Create a Calm Daily Rhythm

Dogs thrive on predictability. Choose simple routines you can maintain:

- morning potty
- breakfast
- quiet enrichment
- rest
- gentle evening routine

Consistency reduces anxiety for both of you.

2. Use Micro-Grounding Moments

These are tiny, 10–20 second resets you can use anytime:

- place your hand on your dog's chest and breathe slowly

- feel your feet on the floor
- relax your shoulders
- inhale for four, exhale for six
- say a grounding phrase (“We’re safe. We’re okay. We’re together.”)

These small practices accumulate into emotional steadiness.

3. Limit Fear-Based Information

You do not need to read every horror story online. You do not need to join every forum. You do not need to expose yourself to panic-driven content. Protect your nervous system the same way you protect your dog’s heart.

4. Build a Support Circle

You deserve support, too. This can include:

- your veterinarian
- a trusted friend
- a partner
- a family member
- a calm online community
- this guide

You don’t have to carry everything alone.

5. Celebrate Small Wins

Healing is not one big moment — it is a collection of tiny victories:

- a calm day
- a good appetite
- a soft gaze

- a deeper sleep
- a quiet evening
- a gentle tail wag

These moments matter. They are signs of progress.

When Fear Spikes (And It Will)

Fear often rises during:

- coughing
- restlessness
- the injection phase
- the waiting period
- late-night quiet moments
- sudden noises or excitement
- days when your dog seems “off”

When this happens:

- pause
- breathe
- ground yourself
- observe your dog calmly
- remind yourself that ups and downs are normal
- reach out to your vet if something feels concerning

Fear is a wave. It rises. It falls. It does not stay forever.

The Heart of This Section

You are not expected to be fearless. You are expected to be present. Your dog doesn't need a perfect guardian — they need a steady one. And you are already showing up with more love, courage, and commitment than you realize.

This journey will change you both. It will deepen your bond. It will strengthen your trust. It will teach you how resilient your dog truly is — and how resilient you are, too. You and your dog are walking this path together. And you are doing it beautifully.

The Positive Action Companion

Heartworm treatment can make you feel powerless — like you're waiting, watching, and hoping without anything concrete you can do.

This section exists to change that.

These are gentle, supportive actions you can take throughout the healing journey. They are not medical steps. They are emotional, environmental, and relational practices that help your dog feel safe — and help you feel steady.

Think of this as your “I can do something right now” list.

1. The Calming Presence Practice

Sit near your dog — not touching, not talking, just present. Breathe slowly. Let your dog choose whether to come closer or simply rest nearby.

This simple act:

- lowers your dog's stress
- regulates their nervous system
- reduces your own anxiety
- strengthens your bond

Presence is medicine.

2. The Safe Space Reset

Choose one spot in your home to be your dog's “healing zone.” It should be:

- soft
- quiet
- predictable
- free from sudden excitement

Refresh it daily with:

- a clean blanket
- a favorite toy
- a gentle scent (like lavender on your wrist, not theirs — and very sparingly, since dogs can smell many times more keenly than humans)
- dim lighting

This becomes the emotional anchor of treatment.

3. The Gentle Routine Ritual

Dogs thrive on rhythm. Create a simple daily flow:

- morning potty
- breakfast
- quiet enrichment
- midday rest
- evening calm time

You don't need perfection — just consistency. Routine reduces anxiety for both of you.

4. The “We’re Safe” Mantra

Choose a grounding phrase you can repeat during moments of fear. Examples:

- “We’re safe.”
- “We’re okay.”
- “We’re together.”
- “One moment at a time.”

Say it softly. Say it slowly. Say it until your shoulders drop. Your dog will feel the shift.

5. The Micro-Enrichment Menu

These activities keep your dog mentally engaged without raising heart rate:

- snuffle mats
- lick mats
- frozen treats
- gentle scent games
- slow, calm chewing
- quiet window watching
- soft music

Enrichment doesn’t have to be exciting — it just has to be soothing.

6. The “Check Yourself First” Pause

Before responding to your dog’s behavior, pause and ask:

- Am I tense?
- Am I rushing?
- Am I projecting fear?

Your dog mirrors your emotional state. When you soften, they soften.

7. The Connection Check-In

Once a day, take 30 seconds to notice:

- your dog’s breathing
- their posture
- their eyes
- their comfort
- their trust

These micro-moments remind you that healing is happening — quietly, steadily, beautifully.

8. The “Ask for Help” Step

You are not meant to carry this alone. Reach out when you need:

- reassurance
- clarity
- emotional support
- a second opinion
- a grounding voice

Asking for help is not weakness — it is wisdom.

9. The Joy Preservation Practice

Even during treatment, joy is allowed. Joy is healing. Find small ways to keep it alive:

- a soft tail wag

- a shared snack
- a quiet cuddle
- a warm morning sunbeam
- a gentle bedtime routine

Joy does not break the rules. Joy strengthens the bond that carries you both through this.

The Heart of This Section

You are not powerless. You are not waiting helplessly. You are actively supporting your dog every single day — through presence, routine, calm, connection, and love.

These small actions create a healing environment that medicine alone cannot provide. You are doing more than you realize. And your dog feels it.

Chapters 1–9

These chapters walk you through the heartworm journey step by step — from the first moment of diagnosis to the final stages of recovery. Each chapter is designed to be clear, emotionally grounding, and easy to follow, even on days when fear or uncertainty feel heavy.

You can read them in order or jump to the chapter that fits your current stage. There is no wrong way to use this guide.

This guide is designed to be used non-linearly. Chapters serve as emotional starting points, while sections provide deeper, modular support. You do not need to read in order — begin where you are.

Chapter 1 — The Diagnosis Moment

If you are holding this guide, something likely feels heavy. A heartworm diagnosis can stop time for a moment. Your mind may race ahead. Your chest may feel tight. Questions may stack faster than answers.

This is a normal response. Fear is not a failure. It is a sign of care.

This guide exists to help you slow things down. You do not need to understand everything at once. You do not need to make every decision today. You do not need to navigate this alone.

Heartworms are serious, but they are treatable. Dogs recover. Lives continue.

This book is not meant to overwhelm you with information. It is meant to steady you. You can read it from beginning to end, or you can open it where you need support most. Each chapter stands on its own. There is no wrong place to start.

Some sections will help you understand the medical process. Others will help you support your dog emotionally. All of them are here to reduce fear, not add to it.

Your dog does not know the diagnosis. They know your presence. They know your voice. They know when you slow your breathing and soften your hands. That matters more than you realize.

This journey may ask for patience. It may ask for stillness. It may ask for trust. You do not have to be perfect. You only have to be present.

When you are ready, turn the page. We will take this one step at a time. You have time to breathe, learn, and choose a path that fits your dog.

Chapter 2 — What to Do in the First 48 Hours

A Calm, Grounded Guide for the Most Overwhelming Moment

First, Take a Breath

The first 48 hours after a heartworm diagnosis often feel destabilizing. Your mind may race. Your body may feel tense. Urgency may press in. Pause here. Nothing needs to be rushed.

What the First 48 Hours Are (and Are Not)

The first 48 hours are:

- a time to stabilize
- a time to gather clear information
- a time to regulate emotions
- a time to protect your dog from sudden change

The first 48 hours are not:

- a deadline to decide everything
- a test of your worth as a guardian
- a medical emergency in most cases
- a moment where panic helps

Heartworms develop slowly. You have time to move forward with intention.

What Actually Matters Right Now

Right now, your priorities are simple:

- keep routines calm and predictable
- avoid bursts of excitement
- feed and hydrate normally
- maintain familiar structure
- schedule — not rush — veterinary follow-up
- protect your own nervous system

You do not need to fix everything today.

What Can Wait (And Why That's Okay)

It is appropriate to wait on:

- choosing a treatment path
- deep research
- lifestyle changes
- diet or supplement shifts
- long-term planning

Waiting does not mean neglect. Waiting means clarity comes first.

Your Dog's Emotional Needs in the First 48 Hours

Your dog may look fine — and that can feel confusing. What they feel most is your energy. Right now, your dog needs:

- calm voices
- normal routines
- predictable care
- emotional steadiness

You do not need to explain anything. You just need to stay present.

Your Nervous System Matters Too

Fear transfers quickly. Calm transfers faster. If you notice spiraling:

- pause research
- step away from forums
- breathe slowly
- ground your body
- remind yourself: treatment works

Your regulation helps your dog regulate.

Common First-48-Hour Mistakes (Gently Reframed)

- Over-researching → choose one or two trusted sources
- Catastrophizing → heartworms are treatable
- Drastic immediate changes → stability first
- Self-blame → heartworms come from mosquitoes, not failure

You are not behind. You are responding appropriately.

A Simple 48-Hour Rhythm

Day One: normal meals, calm routines, short, gentle potty breaks, quiet time together.

Day Two: schedule follow-up care, write down questions, maintain calm structure, avoid overstimulation.

Structure creates safety.

When to Call Your Veterinarian

Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of the following:

- difficulty breathing
- persistent coughing
- collapse or extreme weakness
- anything that feels urgent or concerning to you

If none of these signs are present, it is appropriate to slow down, take a breath, and schedule follow-up care calmly.

The Heart of This Chapter

The first 48 hours are not about action. They are about grounding. You are allowed to slow down. You are allowed to gather information steadily. You are allowed to move forward without fear.

Your dog does not need perfection. They need steadiness. And you are providing that.

Chapter 3 — Understanding Your Treatment Options

Making a Calm, Confident Decision Without Fear

First, Take a Breath

Choosing a heartworm treatment path can feel heavy. You may feel pressure to choose quickly. You may worry about choosing wrong. You may fear regret more than the decision itself.

Pause here. There is no perfect choice. There is an informed one.

What This Chapter Is (and Is Not)

This chapter is:

- a guide for calm decision-making
- support for aligning treatment with your dog and your reality
- a place to choose without fear

This chapter is not:

- a directive
- a judgment
- a replacement for veterinary care

You are not being tested. You are being supported.

The Two Valid Treatment Paths

There are two primary approaches to heartworm treatment:

- Fast Kill (melarsomine-based treatment)

- Slow Kill (preventative plus doxycycline-based treatment)

Both are used. Both save dogs' lives. Both require consistency and veterinary guidance.

A detailed, side-by-side explanation appears in the Fast Kill vs. Slow Kill chapter. This chapter helps you decide how that information applies to your dog.

Why Different People Choose Different Paths

Two caring guardians can make different choices and both be right. Decisions are shaped by:

- your dog's physical health
- your dog's emotional state
- trauma history
- activity level
- your home environment
- your capacity for restriction and monitoring
- your veterinarian's guidance

This is not about bravery. It is about fit.

Questions That Clarify the Right Path

Instead of asking "Which is best?" ask:

- What does my veterinarian recommend, and why?
- How does my dog handle stress, confinement, or change?
- What level of restriction can my home realistically support?
- What feels emotionally manageable for both of us?
- What risks am I prepared to monitor calmly?

Clear answers reduce second-guessing.

About Risk (Without Fear)

Every medical decision carries risk. Untreated heartworms carry the highest risk. Treatment risks are:

- known
- monitored
- managed by veterinary professionals

Avoiding treatment out of fear increases danger. Choosing thoughtfully reduces it.

If You Feel Pressured

Pressure often comes from:

- online stories
- social media
- fear-based messaging
- well-meaning opinions

You are allowed to slow down. You are allowed to ask questions. You are allowed to take a day to decide. Urgency does not equal clarity.

Your Veterinarian's Role

Your veterinarian is your primary medical partner. A healthy partnership includes:

- clear explanations
- openness to questions
- respect for your observations

- collaboration, not coercion

If something feels unclear, ask again. Understanding builds confidence.

After You Choose a Path

Once a decision is made:

- commit to it
- stop re-researching endlessly
- focus on consistency
- return to calm routines

Doubt fades when action becomes steady.

The Heart of This Chapter

You are not choosing between good and bad. You are choosing between two valid paths, guided by information, veterinary support, your dog's needs, and your capacity.

A calm decision is a strong decision. You do not need certainty. You need steadiness. And you are capable of that.

Chapter 4 — Choosing a Treatment Path with Clarity and Confidence

Fast Kill, Slow Kill, and the Decision That Fits Your Dog

Choosing how to treat heartworms is often the moment when fear feels loudest. You may feel pressure to decide quickly. You may worry about choosing the “wrong” path. You may hear strong opinions that make everything feel heavier instead of clearer.

Pause here. This chapter exists to slow the moment down.

There is no single “best” choice for every dog — only the choice that fits your dog’s body, emotional needs, history, and your home’s reality. Both primary treatment paths used today save dogs’ lives. Both require care, consistency, and veterinary guidance. And both can be approached with compassion instead of fear.

This chapter is not here to push you in one direction. It is here to help you understand your options calmly, without judgment or urgency, so you can move forward with confidence instead of doubt.

You will learn:

- What the two primary heartworm treatment approaches are
- How Fast Kill and Slow Kill differ — medically and emotionally
- Why different veterinarians and guardians choose different paths
- How to think about risk without spiraling into fear

- How to make a decision that honors both science and your dog's individuality

Your intuition matters here. Your dog's temperament matters here. Your capacity for restriction, monitoring, and emotional support matters here. This is not a test of courage. It is a process of alignment.

As you read, remind yourself of this truth: you are not choosing between “good” and “bad.” You are choosing between two valid paths, guided by information, veterinary partnership, and love.

Once a choice is made, you can release the fear of “what if” and move forward with intention. Regardless of which approach you follow, one truth remains the same: calm, intentional activity management is essential for healing. In the next chapter, we move into the practical guidance that helps protect your dog's heart and lungs — not through fear or rigidity, but through clarity, structure, and compassion.

Chapter 5 — Activity Restriction Made Simple

This is the chapter most guardians return to again and again.

You will learn:

- what “restricted activity” actually means
- what your dog can do
- what your dog should avoid
- how to prevent sudden bursts of excitement
- how to manage doorways, visitors, and outdoor time
- how to keep your dog mentally enriched without raising heart rate

Calm is medicine — but calm does not mean deprivation.

Not because it is complicated — but because it is human to want your dog back to normal. It is human to second-guess the vet when your dog seems completely fine and is bouncing at the door. It is human to feel guilty enforcing stillness on an animal built for movement.

But understanding why restriction matters — and how to do it with compassion — will carry you and your dog safely through this critical phase. You just need to be intentional.

What “Restricted Activity” Really Means

When veterinarians prescribe rest after heartworm treatment, they do not mean “do less.” They mean the cardiovascular system is under enormous strain and any significant spike in heart rate could dislodge dying worms and push fragments into the lungs — causing a potentially fatal pulmonary embolism.

Restricted activity means keeping your dog’s heart rate low. That is the entire goal. Not punishment. Not boredom. Just protecting a healing cardiovascular system from shock.

Activity restriction typically lasts 8 to 12 weeks depending on your dog’s treatment protocol. This is not a suggestion — it is a medical requirement.

What Your Dog Can Do

Restricted does not mean immobile. The following activities are generally considered safe during the treatment period:

- Short, slow, leashed bathroom walks (5 minutes maximum, no sniffing loops or neighbor greetings)
- Calm sniffing in your yard or a quiet corner of a park
- Gentle grooming sessions that your dog enjoys
- Sitting or lying outside in a safe, low-stimulation area
- Gentle petting and quiet companionship
- Short training sessions using only stationary cues (sit, down, stay, look at me)
- Calm car rides (if your dog settles easily and is secured)
- Sniff mats, lick mats, and puzzle feeders indoors
- Quiet chewing on a safe chew item while lying down

The rule of thumb: if your dog stays calm and their breathing stays steady, it is probably okay. If their tail starts windmilling and they shift into zoomie mode — redirect immediately.

What Your Dog Should Avoid

These activities significantly raise heart rate and must be avoided throughout the restriction period:

- running, chasing, or playing fetch
- rough wrestling or play with other dogs
- jumping on or off furniture, beds, or in and out of vehicles
- off-leash time in unfenced areas
- swimming (even gentle paddling raises heart rate quickly)
- stairs, if avoidable; use ramps or carry small dogs

Even one five-minute sprint could undo weeks of careful management. The danger is invisible — there is no limp or whimper to warn you. The consequences are internal and potentially fatal.

Preventing Sudden Bursts of Excitement

Excitement is the hardest thing to manage — especially for dogs who are feeling better. A few strategies:

- Greet your dog outside before coming in so they can release excitement in a safer place
- Ask visitors to ignore your dog completely on arrival until the dog has calmed down
- Use a baby gate or x-pen to manage the front door
- If your dog has a “doorbell tornado” habit, begin counter-conditioning the sound to calm behavior

- Consider a white noise machine near the front door to muffle outside triggers

Managing Doorways, Visitors, and Outdoor Time

Structure every entry and exit:

- Dogs should always exit and enter through doors calmly, on leash, never bolting
- Outdoor bathroom time should be brief, leashed, and immediately returned inside
- If your dog is crated or contained, ensure the crate is in a low-stimulation room — not in front of a window with squirrels
- Inform all family members, houseguests, and any dog walkers of the restriction protocol — this only works if everyone is on the same page

Mental Enrichment Without Raising Heart Rate

A bored dog is a dangerous dog during restriction. Keep their brain busy:

- scatter feeding (hide kibble around a small area for the dog to sniff out)
- frozen stuffed Kongs or food-stuffed toys
- short, calm training sessions
- sniff walks (stationary: put the sniff mat on the floor and let them work it)
- gentle massage or TTouch bodywork if your dog enjoys handling

Calm Is Medicine

By the end of treatment, many guardians tell us the same thing: the restriction period, though hard, actually deepened their bond with their dog. Forced to slow down, they discovered a whole new language of stillness with their animal.

Your dog does not need adventure right now. They need safety, calm presence, and time. Restricted activity is not a punishment — it is protection. And you, by learning how to do it well, are already giving your dog something no medication alone can provide: a guardian who understands.

It is okay if some days are harder than others. It is okay to feel frustrated or sad when your dog looks at you with those big eyes and you cannot give them the run they want. Feel it — then return to calm. Your dog is watching you. They will follow your lead.

Chapter 6 — Supporting Your Dog Emotionally

Creating Calm, Safety, and Trust During Treatment

First, Take a Breath

Heartworm treatment is not only physical. It is emotional. Even dogs who appear calm may feel unsettled by changes in routine, energy, and restriction. Rescue dogs and sensitive dogs often feel this more deeply. This chapter is here to help you support your dog's emotional safety while their body heals.

Why Emotional Support Matters

Dogs heal best when they feel safe.

Stress increases:

- restlessness
- reactivity
- difficulty settling
- emotional dysregulation

Calm supports:

- deeper rest
- steadier breathing
- emotional resilience
- smoother recovery

Your dog's nervous system is part of their healing.

How Dogs Experience Treatment

Your dog does not understand heartworms, treatment plans, or timelines. What they do understand is:

- changes in routine
- reduced activity
- your emotional state
- the environment around them

When the world feels predictable, dogs relax. When it feels chaotic, stress rises.

Your Emotional State Matters

Dogs read energy before words. If you feel anxious, they feel it. If you rush, they tense. If you soften, they soften. You do not need to hide your feelings. You only need to regulate them. Calm is something you practice, not something you perfect.

Creating Emotional Safety at Home

Emotional safety comes from predictability. Helpful practices include:

- consistent daily routines
- quiet mornings and evenings
- gentle transitions
- reduced stimulation
- familiar resting spaces

Your home becomes part of the treatment. It does not need to be perfect. It needs to be steady.

Reading Your Dog's Stress Signals

Signs of emotional stress may include:

- pacing
- whining
- restlessness
- shallow sleep
- sudden clinginess
- withdrawal
- changes in appetite

These are signals, not misbehavior. Your dog is communicating a need for support.

How to Help Your Dog Settle

What helps most:

- slow, calm movement
- gentle voice tones
- predictable touch
- quiet companionship
- low-energy enrichment
- allowing rest without interruption

Sometimes the most powerful support is simply being nearby. Presence is calming.

Supporting Anxious or Trauma-Sensitive Dogs

Dogs with trauma histories may struggle more during restriction. They may:

- fear confinement
- become hyper-vigilant
- resist rest
- react strongly to changes

If this is your dog, you are not failing. Extra support is not weakness. It is responsiveness.

Low-Energy Emotional Enrichment

Enrichment does not need excitement. Helpful options include:

- lick mats
- snuffle mats
- gentle scent games
- frozen treats
- soft music
- quiet window watching
- calm chewing

The goal is regulation, not stimulation.

Your Dog Does Not Need Constant Interaction

Rest is healing. Allow your dog to sleep. Allow quiet stillness. Doing less is sometimes the most supportive choice.

When Emotional Support Feels Hard

Some days will feel heavier than others. You may feel:

- guilty
- frustrated

- worried
- emotionally tired

These feelings are normal. Caring deeply is demanding. You are allowed to find this difficult.

The Heart of This Chapter

Emotional support is not about fixing feelings. It is about creating safety. Your dog does not need perfection. They need steadiness, presence, and trust. You are already providing that. And it matters more than you realize.

Chapter 7 — Managing Symptoms & Knowing When to Call Your Vet

Staying Calm, Observant, and Confident During Treatment

First, Take a Breath

During heartworm treatment, it is normal to watch your dog more closely. You may notice small changes. You may wonder what is normal. You may feel unsure when something looks “off.” This chapter is here to help you observe calmly, without panic or second-guessing.

What Monitoring Really Means

Monitoring does not mean constant worry. It means:

- noticing patterns
- staying present
- responding thoughtfully
- knowing when to ask for help

You are not expected to diagnose. You are expected to observe and communicate.

Common Symptoms You May Notice

Some dogs experience mild, temporary symptoms during treatment. These may include:

- lower energy
- occasional coughing

- changes in appetite
- restlessness
- increased sleep
- quiet days followed by brighter ones

These shifts are often part of healing.

What Is Usually Normal

Often normal during treatment:

- mild fatigue
- increased need for rest
- brief cough after movement
- quieter behavior
- emotional sensitivity

Normal does not mean comfortable. It means expected and monitored.

What Deserves a Call to Your Vet

Call your veterinarian if you notice:

- persistent or worsening coughing
- labored or rapid breathing
- collapse or fainting
- sudden weakness
- refusal to eat for more than a day
- extreme lethargy
- anything that feels concerning to you

Trust your instincts. You know your dog best.

How to Observe Without Spiraling

Helpful practices:

- notice trends, not moments
- write down changes briefly
- check breathing when your dog is resting
- observe posture and comfort
- pause before assuming the worst

One symptom alone rarely tells the whole story.

Your Emotional Response Matters

Dogs sense tension. If you panic, they tense. If you stay steady, they feel safer. Before reacting:

- pause
- breathe
- observe calmly
- remind yourself that treatment is structured and monitored

Calm responses support healing.

Communicating Clearly With Your Vet

When you call or message your veterinarian, it helps to share:

- what you are seeing
- when it started
- whether it is improving or worsening
- what your dog was doing before it appeared

Clear information leads to clearer guidance.

Avoiding Information Overload

Reading too many stories can increase fear. You do not need:

- worst-case scenarios
- panic-driven forums
- constant comparison

Your dog's journey is individual. Your vet is your primary guide.

When Nothing Seems “Wrong” But You Feel Uneasy

Sometimes intuition matters. If something does not sit right with you, reach out. Asking a question is not overreacting. It is advocacy.

When to Call Your Veterinarian

Contact your veterinarian if you notice any of the following:

- persistent or worsening coughing
- labored, rapid, or unusual breathing
- collapse, fainting, or sudden weakness
- extreme lethargy or a noticeable drop in energy
- refusal to eat for more than 24 hours
- swelling, pain, or signs of discomfort that concern you
- any sudden change that feels unusual or alarming to you

Trust your instincts. Asking a question is not overreacting — it is advocacy. If something feels concerning to you, your veterinarian wants to hear from you.

Most dogs move through treatment with normal ups and downs. This list is not here to create fear — it is here to help you recognize

when support is needed.

The Heart of This Chapter

Monitoring is not about vigilance. It is about awareness. You are not waiting helplessly. You are participating in your dog's care. With calm observation, clear communication, and trust in the process, you are supporting healing every day.

Chapter 8 — The Injection Phase (If Doing Fast Kill)

Getting Through the Most Structured Part of Treatment

First, Take a Breath

If you are entering the injection phase, it is normal to feel apprehensive. This stage often carries the most fear — not because it is unsafe when managed correctly, but because it is unfamiliar and emotionally intense. This chapter is here to help you move through it calmly and confidently.

What the Injection Phase Is

The injection phase is designed to eliminate adult heartworms more quickly. It is:

- structured
- time-limited
- closely monitored
- supported by strict activity restriction

This phase is demanding, but it is temporary.

What to Expect Emotionally

Many guardians report:

- heightened anxiety
- fear of complications
- emotional exhaustion

- increased vigilance
- second-guessing decisions

These responses are normal. Anticipation is often harder than reality itself.

What Your Dog May Experience

Your dog may experience:

- soreness at the injection site
- lower energy
- increased need for rest
- temporary changes in mood
- quieter behavior

These responses are expected and monitored by your veterinary team. Rest is part of the treatment.

Why Rest Is Especially Important Now

During this phase, adult worms begin to die. Strict activity restriction:

- protects the lungs
- reduces complication risk
- supports safe healing

Rest is not optional during this stage. It is protective.

Supporting Your Dog During Injections

Helpful supports include:

- calm transport to and from the vet

- quiet environments at home
- predictable routines
- gentle reassurance
- low-energy enrichment
- allowing extended rest

Your dog does not need stimulation. They need safety and stillness.

Managing Your Own Stress

Your dog senses your emotional state. Helpful practices for you:

- limit exposure to fear-based stories
- avoid excessive online searching
- focus on your veterinarian's guidance
- ground yourself before interactions
- remind yourself this phase is temporary

Calm guardians create calmer dogs.

The “Quiet Month” After Injections

After injections, activity restriction remains strict. This period can feel long. It can test patience. It can feel emotionally heavy. Structure helps:

- consistent routines
- clear daily rhythms
- quiet companionship
- low expectations

Progress may feel invisible. Healing is still happening.

When to Contact Your Vet During This Phase

Contact your veterinarian if you notice:

- persistent or worsening coughing
- labored breathing
- collapse
- extreme lethargy
- significant swelling or pain
- anything that feels concerning

Asking questions is not overreacting. It is responsible care.

If Doubt Creeps In

It is common to question your choice during hard moments.

Remind yourself:

- this phase is finite
- treatment is evidence-based
- rest is protective
- dogs recover every day

Doubt does not mean you chose wrong. It means you care deeply.

The Heart of This Chapter

The injection phase is not the whole journey. It is one chapter. It asks a lot of you. It asks a lot of your dog. With structure, rest, and calm support, this phase passes. You are not just enduring it. You are guiding your dog safely through it.

Chapter 9 — Retesting & Life After Heartworms

Moving Forward With Confidence, Relief, and Trust



Life after treatment — deeper trust, calmer days, and renewed joy.

First, Take a Breath

Reaching this stage often brings mixed emotions. Relief. Hope. Lingering fear. Cautious optimism. All of these can exist at once. This chapter is about helping you transition from vigilance to trust as your dog moves beyond treatment.

What Retesting Represents

Retesting is not just a medical milestone. It is an emotional one. It represents:

- the completion of treatment
- confirmation of progress
- the beginning of a new chapter

Waiting for results can feel heavy. That does not mean something is wrong.

What to Expect Around Retesting

Your veterinarian will guide the timing of retesting. This timeline is intentional. The body needs time to:

- clear dead worms
- reduce inflammation
- stabilize internally

Waiting is part of accuracy. It is not a delay in care.

Managing Anxiety While Waiting

Waiting can bring old fears back to the surface. Helpful reminders:

- treatment has already done its work
- healing continues quietly
- one test does not define the entire journey
- most dogs pass this stage successfully

You are allowed to hope while you wait.

If Results Are Clear

Clear results often bring a wave of relief. You may feel:

- joy
- disbelief
- gratitude
- emotional release

Take time to acknowledge this moment. It marks real progress.

If Results Are Not Fully Clear

Sometimes results require follow-up. This does not mean failure. It does not erase progress. It means:

- the body needs more time
- monitoring will continue
- your vet will guide next steps

Healing is not always linear. Support remains available.

Reintroducing Activity Safely

After treatment, activity returns gradually. Your veterinarian will advise on:

- pacing
- progression
- what to watch for

Slow reintroduction protects confidence and health. There is no rush. Joy will come back step by step.

Life After Heartworms

Life after treatment often feels different. You may notice:

- deeper trust
- stronger connection
- increased awareness
- appreciation for calm moments

The journey changes both of you.

Releasing Lingering Fear

It is normal for fear to linger. Fear softens with time. Confidence grows through experience. Each normal day helps your nervous system reset.

The Heart of This Chapter

Heartworm treatment is not just something you get through. It is something you grow through. You showed up. You learned. You adapted. You stayed present. Your dog healed with your support. Now you move forward together — steadier, wiser, and stronger than before.

The Heart of These Chapters

These chapters are here to guide you, steady you, and remind you that you are capable — even on the days when fear feels heavy. You are not walking this alone. Your dog is not healing alone. This guide is your companion through every stage.

Closing Message

If you are reading this final section, it means you have walked through fear, uncertainty, learning, patience, and love. You have shown up for your dog in ways that many people will never fully understand. You have carried worry in one hand and hope in the other. You have done the hard, quiet work of caring — the kind that doesn't get applause, but changes lives.

Heartworm treatment is not just a medical journey. It is an emotional one. A relational one. A transformative one. And you made it here.

What You Have Done Matters

You created safety. You built routines. You learned new skills. You regulated your own emotions so your dog could feel calm. You advocated. You asked questions. You stayed present. You loved with intention.

These are not small things. These are the things that heal.

What Your Dog Has Done Matters

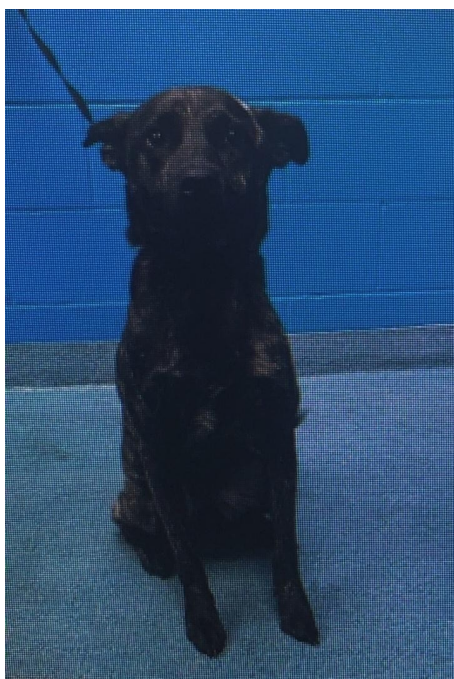
Your dog trusted. Your dog adapted. Your dog rested when it was hard. Your dog learned new rhythms. Your dog allowed themselves to be cared for. Your dog chose connection over fear.

Healing is a partnership — and you both showed up for each other.

Before / After

Before

This was the starting point.



Zuri at intake — uncertain, vulnerable, and still waiting for safety, with euthanasia ever close by.

After — Healed / Second Chance



Zuri after healing — steady, secure, and fully home.

What Comes Next

Life after heartworms is full of:

- deeper trust
- softer mornings
- calmer hearts
- renewed joy
- gratitude for the ordinary
- appreciation for the quiet moments



Renewed joy, calmer hearts — life after heartworms.

You may find that your bond feels stronger than before — not because of the diagnosis, but because of how you walked through it

together.

If You Still Feel Fear Sometimes

That's normal. Fear doesn't disappear overnight. But it softens. It loosens its grip. It becomes a visitor instead of a constant companion.

When fear rises, remember:

- your dog is here
- you are here
- you have already done the hardest parts
- you know how to support your dog
- you know how to support yourself

You are not the same person you were at the beginning of this journey. You are steadier. You are wiser. You are more capable than you realize.

A Final Thought

Your dog doesn't know the medical details. They don't know the terminology. They don't know the protocols. They know one thing:

You stayed. You showed up. You protected them. You loved them through fear, through waiting, through healing. And that love — your love — is the reason they are here today.

Thank You

Thank you for choosing compassion. Thank you for choosing patience. Thank you for choosing hope. Thank you for choosing your dog.

This guide was created to support you, but you are the one who made healing possible. You and your dog have walked a long road together. Now it's time to step into the next chapter — one filled with peace, joy, and the quiet, beautiful moments you both deserve.

About the Authors

This guide was created through lived experience, deep compassion, and a commitment to helping dogs and their guardians feel safe, informed, and supported. It is not written from a distance — it is written from inside the journey.

Zuri — Co-Author & Heart of the Story

Zuri is a rescue dog whose healing journey inspired this guide. She arrived fearful, underweight, and heartworm-positive — but also gentle, curious, and quietly brave. Through patience, safety, and love, she transformed into a joyful, trusting soul who now thrives in her forever home.

Her story is woven into every chapter because she represents every dog who needs a second chance. Her resilience is the heartbeat of this guide.

Roxy — Co-Author in Spirit

Roxy's life was short, but her impact was profound. She taught the lessons that shaped this mission: that every dog deserves safety, that healing is possible even in small moments, and that love given freely becomes legacy. Her memory continues to guide the tone, compassion, and purpose of this work.

Sam Carter — Human Author & Guardian

Sam Carter is the human behind Zuri's healing journey. She walked through the fear, the uncertainty, the late-night worries, the research rabbit holes, and the emotional weight that heartworm treatment brings. Sam Carter learned what information helps — and what overwhelms. She learned how to create safety, how to regulate emotions, and how to support a dog who had survived more than most people realize.

This guide exists because Sam Carter lived the experience and wanted others to feel less alone.

This book was created to offer:

- clarity where there is confusion
- calm where there is fear
- compassion where there is overwhelm
- structure where there is uncertainty
- hope where there is doubt

It is a companion for anyone walking the heartworm journey — a steady voice in a moment when everything feels fragile.

The Mission Moving Forward

The authors believe in:

- rescue dogs
- second chances
- trauma-informed care
- emotionally safe education
- accessible, non-judgmental guidance
- empowering guardians through knowledge and compassion

This guide is only the beginning. Its purpose is to support healing — not just for dogs, but for the humans who love them.

Acknowledgments

This guide exists because healing is never a solitary act. It is shaped by the dogs who teach us, the people who support us, and the quiet moments of courage that carry us forward.

To the Dogs

To Zuri, whose resilience and gentleness inspired every chapter. To Roxy, whose memory continues to guide this mission with tenderness and purpose. To every rescue dog who has ever needed patience, safety, and a second chance — this work is for you.

To the Humans Who Show Up

To the guardians who choose compassion over convenience. To the people who stay up late researching, comforting, and hoping. To those who walk the heartworm journey with trembling hands but steady hearts — your love changes lives.

To the Veterinary Professionals

To the veterinarians, technicians, and staff who provide care, clarity, and reassurance. Your expertise and empathy make healing possible.

To the Supporters Behind the Scenes

To friends, family, and community members who offer encouragement, grounding, and understanding. Your presence matters more than you know.

To Everyone Who Believes in Rescue

Thank you for believing that every dog deserves safety, dignity, and a chance to heal. Thank you for choosing kindness in a world that often forgets its power.

About Exception Nation

Exception Nation exists in part to honor the resilience of rescue dogs and the humans who love them. This work is a mission-driven creative guide dedicated to emotionally safe education, trauma-informed storytelling, and compassionate guidance for guardians navigating complex journeys with their dogs.

We believe dogs and people are often misunderstood, so first try to understand, then move forward.

Our work blends:

- lived experience
- emotional clarity
- accessible, non-judgmental support
- practical, grounded frameworks
- a commitment to second chances

We believe that healing happens in relationships — between dogs and humans, between fear and understanding, between uncertainty and hope.

Our Values

Compassion — Every dog and every guardian deserves gentleness, patience, and emotional safety.

Clarity — Information should empower, not overwhelm. We translate complexity into calm, accessible guidance.

Dignity — Rescue dogs are not defined by their past. They deserve respect, understanding, and a chance to thrive.

Hope — Healing is possible — physically, emotionally, and relationally. We hold space for that possibility in every piece of work we create.

Storytelling with Purpose — Stories shape understanding. We use narrative to illuminate, comfort, and connect.

Our Vision

A world where rescue dogs are seen, understood, and supported — and where guardians feel confident, informed, and emotionally grounded as they walk alongside them.

Our Commitment

Exception Nation is dedicated to creating resources that are:

- emotionally safe
- scientifically informed
- accessible to all guardians
- grounded in lived experience
- supportive rather than prescriptive
- designed to reduce fear, not amplify it

This guide is one expression of that mission — a companion for anyone navigating heartworm treatment with love, courage, and hope.

Resources & Further Reading

The following resources are provided to support further understanding and informed conversations with your veterinarian.

Official Heartworm Guidance (Trusted, Evidence-Based Sources)

- American Heartworm Society (AHS) — Pet Owner Resources. Website: <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/>
- American Heartworm Society (AHS) — Canine Heartworm Guidelines. Website: <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/veterinary-resources/american-heartworm-society-guidelines>
- Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) — Guidelines & Risk Tools. Website: <https://capcvet.org/>

Holistic & Integrative Veterinary Organizations

- American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA) — professional organization for holistic and integrative veterinary practice. Website: <https://www.ahvma.org/>. Email: office@ahvma.org.
- Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy (AVH) — directory of certified veterinary homeopaths and continuing education. Website: <https://theavh.org/>. Email: avhsupport@gmail.com.

Clear, Accessible Medical Overviews

- Merck Veterinary Manual (Pet Owner Version) — Heartworm Disease in Dogs. Website: <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/dog-owners/heart-and-blood-vessel-disorders-of-dogs/heartworm-disease-in-dogs>

Understanding Local Risk & Prevention

- CAPC Pet Disease Alerts & Regional Heartworm Forecasts. Website: <https://capcvet.org/maps/>

Emotional & Behavioral Support During Treatment

Fear Free Happy Homes (Pet Parent Resources): science-based guidance for reducing fear, anxiety, and stress in dogs, with practical tips for creating emotionally safe home environments. Website: <https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/>.

The above resources are provided to support further understanding and informed conversations with your veterinarian. They are included for educational purposes and reflect widely used, evidence-based perspectives available at the time of writing. Inclusion here does not imply endorsement of every statement or recommendation, and this guide does not replace professional veterinary advice. Use these resources as optional references, at your own pace, and in partnership with trusted veterinary care.

Veterinary Partnership Resources — Questions to Ask Your Veterinarian

Bring these to appointments or phone calls to help you feel grounded and informed:

- “Can you walk me through the treatment path you recommend and why?”
- “What symptoms should I watch for, and what is normal during treatment?”
- “How can I keep my dog calm and safe at home?”
- “What should I do if my dog coughs, seems restless, or has a low-energy day?”
- “How often should we check in or retest?”

These questions help you advocate for your dog without feeling overwhelmed.

Emotional Support Resources — Grounding Practices for Guardians

Use these when fear spikes or uncertainty feels heavy:

- slow breathing with longer exhales
- placing a hand on your dog’s chest
- repeating a calming phrase
- stepping outside for fresh air
- journaling your dog’s small wins

Emotional steadiness is part of the healing process.

Home Environment Resources — Calm Enrichment Ideas

These activities keep your dog mentally engaged without raising heart rate:

- snuffle mats
- lick mats

- frozen treats
- gentle scent games
- soft music
- quiet window watching

Enrichment doesn't need to be exciting — it needs to be soothing.

Community Support — Finding Safe, Non-Fear-Based Spaces

Look for communities that offer:

- calm, supportive discussion
- evidence-informed guidance
- no shaming or fear tactics
- respect for different treatment paths
- emotional safety for guardians

If a space increases your anxiety, it is not the right space for you.

Educational Topics to Explore

If you want to learn more (at your own pace), consider reading about:

- how heartworms develop
- how preventatives work
- the role of doxycycline
- the importance of activity restriction
- emotional regulation for dogs
- trauma-informed care for rescue animals
- building predictable routines

Knowledge is grounding — but only when taken in gentle doses.

When to Seek Additional Support

Reach out to your veterinarian if you need:

- clarity about symptoms
- reassurance during a difficult moment
- guidance on activity levels
- help interpreting changes in behavior
- support during the injection phase

If you decide on the Slow Kill method, ask what you can expect during and after treatment days, and the best supplements to promote healthy healing for any method used. You are not expected to navigate this alone.

Where to Obtain or Request Copies of This Guide

This guide is available directly through the publisher's website. Individual copies and institutional licensing for rescues, shelters, foster programs, and veterinary professionals can be arranged via the contact details below.

- Purchase a copy: <https://www.howzuribeatheartworms.com>
- Questions, comments, or institutional licensing inquiries: support@howzuribeatheartworms.com

We read every message. If this guide has helped you or your organization, we would love to hear your story.

The Heart of This Section

Resources are not here to overwhelm you — they are here to empower you. Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. Return whenever you need grounding, clarity, or reassurance. You and your dog are doing beautifully.

Final Words

If you are reading this, you have reached the end of the guide — but not the end of your journey. Healing continues in the quiet moments, the soft mornings, the steady routines, and the deepening bond between you and your dog.

This guide was created to walk beside you, not ahead of you. To offer clarity, not pressure. To bring calm, not fear. To remind you that you are capable, your dog is resilient, and healing is possible.

You Have Done Something Extraordinary

You chose compassion when fear tried to take over. You chose patience when the process felt long. You chose presence when uncertainty felt heavy. You chose love — again and again.

Your dog felt that. Your dog trusted that. Your dog healed because of that.

Carry This Forward

Let the lessons of this journey stay with you:

- that calm is powerful
- that small moments matter
- that healing is relational
- that dogs thrive in safety
- that you are stronger than you realized

These truths will serve you long after heartworms are behind you.

A Quiet Blessing for the Road Ahead

May your home be peaceful. May your routines be gentle. May your dog rest deeply and joyfully. May your heart feel lighter with each passing day. May the bond you built during this journey continue to grow in softness and trust.

You Are Not Alone

Wherever you go next — with this dog, with future dogs, with the mission of rescue, or simply with a deeper understanding of love — know that you are part of a community of people who choose compassion in a world that desperately needs it.

Thank you for walking this path. Thank you for loving your dog so fiercely. Thank you for being the kind of guardian who turns fear into understanding and uncertainty into hope.

This is not just the end of a guide. It is the beginning of a new chapter — one filled with peace, connection, and the quiet joy of knowing you did something truly meaningful.

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- Purchase: <https://www.howzuribeatheartworms.com>
- Questions or comments:
support@howzuribeatheartworms.com

Thank you for walking through each chapter with courage, curiosity, and love. This guide was created to support you — not with pressure, not with fear, but with clarity, steadiness, and compassion. If it helped you breathe easier, understand more clearly, or feel less alone at any point in your journey, then it fulfilled its purpose.

Thank You for Showing Up for Your Dog

Your dog may not understand the words in these pages, but they understand you — your presence, your patience, your gentleness, your commitment.

They feel the safety you create. They feel the love you give. They feel the steadiness you bring into their world.

You are their home. You are their comfort. You are their healing.

Thank You for Choosing Compassion

In a world that often rushes, overlooks, or dismisses the vulnerable, you chose to slow down. You chose to learn. You chose to care deeply. You chose to give your dog the chance every rescue animal deserves.

That choice matters. It changes lives — one dog, one guardian, one moment at a time.

Thank You for Being Part of This Mission

By reading this guide, you have joined a community of people who believe in:

- second chances
- trauma-informed care
- emotionally safe education
- dignity for rescue dogs
- healing through connection

Your journey adds to that mission. Your story becomes part of the larger story — one of hope, resilience, and love.

A Final Thank You

Thank you for being here. Thank you for caring. Thank you for loving your dog the way you do.

Wherever you go next — in healing, in rescue, in life — may you carry forward the gentleness, clarity, and courage that brought you to these pages.

You and your dog have walked a long road together. Now you get to walk into the light.

Back Cover

Heartworms are frightening — but they don't have to be.

This gentle, science-informed guide was created to help dog guardians navigate heartworm treatment with clarity, confidence, and compassion. Whether your dog is a rescue, a longtime companion, or a newly adopted friend, this book offers the emotional grounding and practical knowledge you need to support them through healing.

Inside, you'll find:

- calm, accessible explanations of heartworms and treatment
- science-informed guidance without fear-based messaging
- emotionally grounded support for both dogs and humans
- trauma-aware insights for rescue dogs
- practical tools for creating a safe, healing home
- real-world strategies for managing rest, stress, and uncertainty

Written with warmth and scientific clarity, the Heartworm Healing Guide is more than a medical reference — it is a companion for the journey. It honors the resilience of dogs, the courage of their humans, and the quiet power of healing in a safe, loving home.

Your dog can get through this. You don't have to do it alone.

*The Heartworm Healing Guide — A Calm, Compassionate
Companion for You and Your Dog*

Exception Nation Publishing

San Antonio, Texas

By Exception Nation. Inspired by Zuri. In Memory of Roxy.

Purchase & Contact

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