

Pancreatitis

Pancreatic disorders occur frequently in the dog and cat. The pancreas is a gland in the abdomen that produces enzymes which aid in the digestion of food. If, because of injury or disease, these digestive enzymes become activated within the pancreas before they are released, they will begin digesting the pancreas itself. This self digestion causes severe inflammation called pancreatitis which is associated with pain and tenderness of the abdomen. Pancreatitis is usually classified as either acute (occurs suddenly) or chronic (an ongoing condition).

SIGNS OF PANCREATITIS

The signs of pancreatitis usually occur suddenly in dogs and cats. You'll need to be aware of the signs so you can get treatment for your pet as soon as possible. A pet with pancreatitis can exhibit the following signs: lack of appetite, frequent vomiting and diarrhea which may contain blood. A pet may also drink more water than usual and vomit it soon after consumption. Weakness, inability to walk and abdominal tenderness or pain may be present. These signs are not unique to pancreatitis: therefore our veterinarians may recommend tests to differentiate pancreatitis from other diseases.

CAUSES OF PANCREATITIS

Although the exact cause of pancreatitis is often unknown, there are several common contributing factors.

Hyperlipemia: (high blood fat content) is a condition in which the amount of fat in the blood is elevated. Hyperlipemia occurs normally for a short period after a meal then returns to the correct level. However, some pets, like some people, have a metabolic problem which prevents the proper clearing of the fat from the blood stream. Research studies have recently shown that hyperlipemia contributes to the development of pancreatitis.

Obesity: Many dogs with pancreatitis are overweight. Dogs also are more likely to develop pancreatitis after eating a meal with a high fat content.

DIAGNOSIS OF ACUTE PANCREATITIS

Your veterinarian will want to perform a thorough physical exam, evaluate your pet's clinical signs, and ask you questions about your pet's health history. If, after examining your pet, a veterinarian suspects pancreatitis, a blood sample for laboratory analysis may be required.

CHRONIC PANCREATITIS

Dogs with chronic pancreatitis often have a history of repeated bouts of abdominal pain and gastrointestinal upset. Between episodes, the dog seems normal, but each episode of acute pancreatitis causes additional destruction of the pancreas.

Cats, in contrast to dog's frequent bouts of acute pancreatitis, experience persistent chronic pancreatitis, producing a slowly progressive inflammation and vague signs of illness. Abdominal pain is not present in cats with pancreatitis. Many of them also urinate more often than usual.

TREATMENT

In order for the pancreas to heal, it must be completely "rested" to allow time to recuperate. Your pet may be hospitalized so that no food, water, or medications need be given orally until the acute signs subside. Anything given by mouth can stimulate the pancreas to produce more destructive enzymes, which, of course, we want to prevent.

Under "Causes of Pancreatitis," it was mentioned that hyperlipemia and high blood fat levels may contribute to the development of pancreatitis. Therefore, high fat diets should be avoided, such as:

- Fatty meals
- Treats such as table scraps
- Meat trimmings or fat supplements
- Ingestion of garbage

In addition to dietary management, there are certain drugs our veterinarians may recommend to help manage pancreatitis. It may be necessary for your pet to return to the veterinarian periodically for exams and additional blood work to evaluate the treatment protocol and check for recurrence of the disease.



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