



PANCREATITIS

What is pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. The pancreas is a gland that sits between the stomach and the first part of the small intestine. It's two main jobs are to produce insulin (not usually relevant to pancreatitis) and to make digestive enzymes. These enzymes are held in an inactivated form inside the gland and are squirted down a duct into the small intestine where they contact food and then become activated and digest the food. In pancreatitis, these enzymes are activated inside the gland and start digesting the gland to a varying degree. This provokes inflammation. Some cases can be mild and go unnoticed as mild inappetence or a single vomit, other cases can be very severe and life threatening if the whole gland is badly damaged.

What causes it?

There are two main known causes of pancreatitis. The most common is often following a rich, fatty meal. The other main known cause is major trauma such as being hit by a car.

We do see cases with no obvious association, that seem to arise spontaneously too, these are called "idiopathic" – meaning no known cause.

What are the clinical signs?

The diagnosis of pancreatitis is based on a blood test and clinical signs. Sometimes further tests are required to assess the severity of the inflammation such as repeat laboratory tests, radiographs (x-rays) and/or ultrasound examination. The disease is typically manifested by nausea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea. Laboratory tests usually reveal an elevated white blood cell count; however, an elevated white blood cell count may also be caused by many other things besides pancreatitis. The elevation of pancreatic enzymes in the blood is probably the most helpful criteria in detecting pancreatic disease. Radiographs and ultrasound studies may show an area of inflammation or abscesses in the location of the pancreas and help to rule out peritonitis (inflammation of the whole of the inside of the abdomen).

How is pancreatitis treated?

The successful management of pancreatitis will depend on early intervention. There is no way to quickly switch off the inflammation, but supportive care with IV fluids, strong pain relief and treatment of vomiting and nausea will help accelerate healing. The mild form of the disease is best treated by just resting the pancreas from its role in digestion for 24 hours by withholding food (not water.). In addition, anti-inflammatory drugs are sometimes administered. The presence of shock necessitates the immediate and intense use of intravenous fluids. Antibiotics are also indicated in many cases.



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Will my dog recover?

The prognosis depends on the extent of the disease when presented and a favourable response to initial therapy. Dogs with severe pancreatitis that results in shock, pancreatic abscesses or peritonitis have a very guarded prognosis and can die despite our best efforts. Most of the mild forms of pancreatitis have a good prognosis with no long term effects other than the pancreas now being sensitive to fatty foods.

Typically the recovery will depend on what the dog is fed at home. We recommend a prescription low fat diet **ONLY** for all cases, as fat is usually implicated in the cause. Pet owners also need to be very careful with treats or any other food that could be higher than 11% fat content. Usually pancreatitis will re occur when the pet accidentally eats something high in fat. This could potentially happen at any point in the rest of the pet's life.

Owners need to be aware that bone marrow is about 100% fat (highest risk), dairy products such as cheese and butter (which are also in human biscuits, baked goods etc.) are about 30% fat, and pet mince can be 30% fat or higher. Lean mince and steak with the fat cut off is still usually more than 11% fat content as well. Safe treats are boiled chicken meat/breast, tuna in spring water, vegetables (not corn cobs) or Greenies (for teeth).

Will there be any long-term problems?

Usually there are no long term problems in most cases, as long as fatty food is avoided. Some dogs that have mild cases could eventually go back onto normal food.

There are three possible long-term complications that may follow severe or repeated pancreatitis. If a significant number of cells that produce digestive enzymes are destroyed, a lack of proper food digestion may follow. This is known as pancreatic insufficiency and can be treated with daily administration of enzyme tablets or powder in the food. If a significant number of cells that produce insulin are destroyed, diabetes mellitus can result and insulin therapy may be needed. In rare cases, adhesions between the abdominal organs may occur as a consequence of pancreatitis. However, most dogs recover with no long-term effects.

If you have any questions or concerns about your pet please don't hesitate to call us on 9509 7611.



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