

Pancreatitis.

Pancreatitis is a condition where the Pancreas becomes inflamed. The Pancreas is an organ that releases enzymes into the intestine to digest food. It also produces Insulin which is needed to control the body's blood sugar levels.





When the Pancreas becomes inflamed, the release of these digestive enzymes becomes uncontrolled and abnormal breakdown of fat and proteins starts in the Pancreas and other body organs. This destructive process effectively means the body begins to digest itself, so severe inflammation and shock can follow.

Many cases of Pancreatitis are mild, and the inflammation resolves without any permanent damage to the Pancreas and other organs. It can however be a very severe disease and can be fatal.

The cause of Pancreatitis is often unknown, especially in cats, but it can be triggered by having high levels of fat in the diet or high levels of fat in the blood. Pancreatitis is seen more often in certain dog breeds such as miniature schnauzers, miniature poodles and cocker spaniels. Any breed of dog or cat can be affected though.

What signs suggest my pet has Pancreatitis?

Any of the following may be seen in cases of Pancreatitis:

-  Loss of appetite
-  Lack of energy
-  Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
-  Abdominal pain (which can be severe)

If your pet has any of the above signs you should contact the surgery immediately for advice.

How is Pancreatitis diagnosed?

It can be very difficult to be certain your pet has Pancreatitis, as the clinical signs of this disease are similar to many other diseases. There is also not one single test that is completely reliable to confirm the condition; we often need to combine results of several tests to diagnose Pancreatitis.

Blood tests to rule in or out other diseases such as liver disease and kidney disease are usually advised. We can also check pancreatic enzyme levels on a blood test.

An ultrasound scan of the abdomen allows us to look at the Pancreas for signs of inflammation, and also allows us to check the rest of the organs in the abdomen to rule in or out conditions that could cause similar signs.

The most reliable way to diagnose Pancreatitis is to take a biopsy of the Pancreas under general anaesthetic. As this is an invasive test, we do not commonly do this.

How do you treat Pancreatitis?

Frustratingly there is no specific treatment to reduce the inflammation in the Pancreas. Treatment is supportive to keep your pet comfortable and well hydrated while the inflammation gradually subsides.

Mild cases can be managed at home, but in more serious cases it is common for us to hospitalise your pet for intravenous fluids and strong painkillers. Anti-sickness medication and antacids are commonly given as well.

Some cases of Pancreatitis will resolve quickly within a day or two, whereas others may need several days of intensive hospital care before they are beginning to improve.

What is the prognosis for my pet?

Most pets will make a full recovery from Pancreatitis. Some pets, although they recover from an episode, can develop recurring Pancreatitis and may need specific diets long term to try and minimise the chances of it recurring.

For any pet that has had Pancreatitis, keeping your pet as close to their ideal weight as possible is recommended as obesity is known to be a risk factor for recurrence. High-fat diets should be avoided in dogs and any treats like table scraps stopped!

In cats it is thought fat content is less important as a possible trigger for Pancreatitis, but it can be connected to inflammatory bowel disease so we may advise feeding a specific, easily digestible diet. It can also help to reduce painful muscle spasm and encourage blood flow to the muscles.

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