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Small Animal Department



PANCREATITIS

What happens during a bout of pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas, causing leakage of the digestive enzymes whereby the pancreas literally starts to "digest itself". Pancreatitis can be acute (sudden) or chronic (happening over a course of time).

Both acute and chronic forms are serious and can be life-threatening, especially the acute form.

What causes pancreatitis?

For the majority of cases, the cause is unknown. Pancreatitis can occur in both dogs and cats, but is more common in dogs, especially the acute form. Cats more commonly have the chronic form, and it can be difficult to diagnose.

In dogs, obese middle age to older animals have a higher incidence, as do females. Even though exact causes are not known, there are identifiable risk factors. Here are some potential risk factors:

- High fat content in blood
- High fat meals
- Obesity (especially dogs)
- Concurrent disease - i.e. Cushing's, Diabetes
- Contaminated food or water
- Certain drugs and toxins - i.e. some types of diuretics, antibiotics, and insecticides
- Bacterial or viral infection

What are the signs of pancreatitis?

The signs can vary from a mild tummy upset to collapse and death. Most animals present with common gastrointestinal signs of upset, such as:

Vomiting

Not eating

Painful abdomen, hunched appearance (more common in dogs)

Fever or sub-normal body temperature

Diarrhoea

Depression

Dehydration

These signs are not specific for pancreatitis, and can be seen with many gastrointestinal diseases and conditions. All or some of the signs may be noted in an individual patient with pancreatitis. Cats can be especially difficult to diagnose due to the vague signs they exhibit with chronic pancreatitis - depression/lethargy and poor appetite are seen with regularity, and gastrointestinal signs of vomiting, diarrhea, and / or pain are seen intermittently.

How is pancreatitis diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will evaluate your pet's history (i.e. getting into the garbage, eating a lot of food they normally don't - especially fatty foods, etc.), do a thorough physical examination, and likely do blood tests to rule out other diseases and to check pancreatic enzymes. Ultrasound and xrays may also be done to help confirm the diagnosis or rule out other diseases that may show similar symptoms.