

Aliso Beach Animal Clinic  
Dr. Susan Davis, D.V.M.  
Dr. Paul Reid, D.V.M.  
30816 Coast Hwy.  
South Laguna, CA 92651  
(949) 499-4190

## **GASTROENTERITIS**

Your pet has been diagnosed as having gastroenteritis. This brochure is provided to help you learn about the disease and how to care for your pet at home.

### **GASTROENTERITIS**

Gastritis is inflammation of the stomach; enteritis is inflammation of the intestinal tract. Consequently, gastroenteritis is an inflammation of the stomach and the intestines. Although these conditions involve separate portions of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, one seldom occurs without the other being present also.

### **SIGNS OF GASTROENTERITIS**

The two most significant signs associated with gastroenteritis are vomiting and diarrhea. Vomiting is normally preceded by a period of nausea, with licking, salivation or repeated attempts at swallowing. This period is followed by retching and forceful vomiting. Other clinical signs include belching, increased thirst and increased water consumption. These clinical signs may be followed by a craving for unnatural articles of food such as dirt, house plants or grass. Later in this syndrome, the vomited material and diarrhea may contain blood resulting from increased irritation in the GI system. The fluid loss associated with the vomiting and diarrhea may result in dehydration. Your pet may also exhibit extreme abdominal tenderness.

### **CAUSES OF GASTROENTERITIS**

Gastroenteritis has been associated with many factors, but frequently associated with ingestion of rancid or spoiled food. These spoiled leftovers or garbage often contain bacteria and occasionally mold which can contribute to the digestive upset.

Eating non-food substances such as food wrappers, bones, plastic, rocks and small toys, damages the stomach lining. The incidence of swallowing these types of things is greater in young animals, possibly because of their chewing habits and curious natures. In some longhaired cats and dogs, hair accumulates and frequently causes problems in the stomach. Certain drugs, such as aspirin, or chemicals such as cleaning agents and herbicides, are reported to cause gastroenteritis in the dog and cat.

Other causes of gastroenteritis include the ingestion of certain plants and plant toxins. Infectious agents such as bacteria or viruses are commonly associated with gastroenteritis and internal parasites, such as hookworms, can be a contributing factor. Disease conditions, such as kidney disease, liver, disease, ulcers, cancer, inflammation or even stress, may cause the development of gastroenteritis. Another cause can be sensitivities produced by food allergies.

Foods reported to cause allergies in dogs and cats include dairy products, beef, fish, mutton, pork, chicken, wheat, soy and many others. Usually the pet has been consuming the food for years before a food allergy develops.

### **DIAGNOSIS OF GASTROENTERITIS**

The causes of gastroenteritis are often difficult to diagnose, and in some cases may never be determined. A diagnosis of gastroenteritis is made on the basis of a pet's health history, clinical signs and physical examination findings. Because the causes of gastroenteritis are so variable, additional tests may also be required. These tests can include the examination of vomit for foreign materials, or special abdominal x-rays using a contrast dye to show gastrointestinal abnormalities. A blood sample may help reveal dehydration or other disease and a stool examination may determine the presence of internal parasites. In some cases, an endoscopy or exploratory surgery may be necessary. If a food allergy is suspected, your veterinarian may ask you to keep your pet on a highly restricted diet for several weeks.

To evaluate how well your pet is responding to therapy, your veterinarian may periodically repeat some of these tests. Therefore, bring your pet in for reexamination as directed by your veterinarian.

#### TREATMENT/MANAGEMENT

Dietary restriction is the initial therapy for acute gastroenteritis. Your pet may not be allowed to eat or drink for several days. During this time, intravenous fluid may be necessary to help correct any deficiencies. Medication may also be administered which will help suppress vomiting and slow the movement of ingested materials through the GI system. After food restriction, solid food is reintroduced gradually over a two or three day period in the form of bland food such as Prescription Diet Canine i/d for dogs or Prescription Diet Feline c/d for cats. Start with several small meals, several times daily until your pet tolerates its previous feeding regimen.

Depending on the cause of the gastroenteritis, antibiotics may be necessary. Initially, antibiotics will be given by injection but may be followed up with administration of medication by mouth at home.

In cases where non-food matter has been eaten, surgery may be necessary. Following surgery, solid food is reintroduced in the form of a bland diet specifically designed for gastrointestinal disease, such as Prescription Diet Canine i/d for dogs or Feline c/d for cats. These formulas are designed to be extremely digestible to help avoid further irritation to the already sensitive GI tract. If internal parasites have been detected, medication will be necessary to correct this problem.

If your pet is suffering from gastroenteritis due to food allergy, a hypoallergenic diet such as Prescription Diet Canine d/d or Feline d/d may be recommended. These diets are formulated to reduce the likelihood of your pet eating an offending food or to help diagnose the type of food allergy present. Remember, treats and table snacks may also cause food allergies. If food allergy is diagnosed, your pet will probably need to remain on a carefully controlled diet for an indefinite period of time.

#### FEEDING DIRECTIONS

Follow your veterinarian's directions when feeding the recommended food. Although these foods or formulas may not look like typical pet foods, most pets readily eat them. If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept the new formula after two days, you may want to try the following.

1. If the canned food has been refrigerated, warm the food to, but not above, body temperature.
2. Hand feed the new food for the first few days.
3. Mix the dry food with a little warm water and wait ten minutes before serving. (Use this technique with the dog only)
4. Over a seven to ten day period, mix the food with your pet's former food, gradually increasing the portion of the Prescription Diet food until only the new food is being fed.
5. With the approval of your veterinarian, add one to three tablespoons of homemade clear, unsalted chicken broth to the recommended formula.

Feed only the recommended formula. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is very important. The recovery of your pet depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

#### HOME MANAGEMENT

Once at home, your pet needs special attention and care. Provide plenty of fresh, clean water at all times, unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian. If your pet requires surgery, follow your veterinarian's instructions for care and activity. This will include frequently checking the incision and returning to your veterinarian for rechecks.

Follow instructions carefully for the entire period over which the recommended food listed, or medication is prescribed.

Call your veterinarian if questions or problems arise. Watch your pet for any signs that the condition is returning. Most cases of gastroenteritis are acute which means they occur suddenly. Acute cases generally respond well to dietary management and medications. However, some chronic cases may be a recurring problem requiring time and patience on your part. If any clinical signs occur, please contact your veterinarian.

**SPECIAL HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR PET**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---