

PANCREATITIS

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

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. It also produces some hormones such as insulin, which are secreted into the blood. 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 will exhibit some or all of 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 soon after consumption. Weakness, inability to walk and abdominal tenderness or pain may be present. Body temperature will vary in pets with pancreatitis, but usually the temperature will be higher than normal at the onset of the disease and then fall to below normal as the condition continues. The eyes may become sunken, and the mouth and eyes may become very dry, indicating dehydration. These signs are not unique to pancreatitis; therefore your veterinarian may recommend tests to differentiate pancreatitis from other diseases.

CAUSES OF PANCREATITIS

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

- **Hyperlipemia:** 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. Some research studies have shown recently that hyperlipemia contributes to the development of pancreatitis.
- **Obesity:** Many dogs with pancreatitis are overweight. Dogs are also more likely to develop pancreatitis after eating a meal with a high fat content, especially fatty table scraps. Therefore, dietary fat intake and the nutritional status of the animal are important factors in this disease.
- **Infectious Disease:** Bacterial or viral infections can contribute to the development of pancreatitis in the dog or cat. Bacterial infections are often contracted by consuming spoiled or contaminated food or water. Viral infections usually result from contact with other infected animals.
- **Trauma:** Any trauma or injury that involves the abdomen in the dog or cat can contribute to the development of pancreatitis. For example, pets injured in automobile accidents commonly develop pancreatitis.

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, your veterinarian suspects pancreatitis, a blood sample for laboratory analysis may be required.

This lab evaluation will determine the levels of cholesterol, amylase and lipase (digestive enzymes) and white blood cells.

TREATMENT

The most important therapeutic measure is to withhold all food, water and medications taken by mouth in order to reduce the need for the pancreas to work. Dehydration must also be corrected or avoided by giving fluid intravenously or by injection under the skin. Occasionally the severity of this disease requires that no solid food be fed for a period of two to five days. Any food that is eaten will stimulate the release of digestive enzymes from the pancreas. Since the pancreas is especially sensitive at this time, the amount of these enzymes required should be kept at a minimum. Solid food should be reintroduced gradually. During recovery, your pet should be fed small quantities of diets that contain highly digestible nutrients and a low fat level such as Prescription Diet® Canine i/d® or Prescription Diet® Feline w/d® dietary pet food. These feedings can be increased in quantity until a return to normal dietary habits has been achieved.

Indiscriminate feeding practices may help contribute to the occurrence or recurrence of pancreatitis. If your pet has been treated for pancreatitis previously or if your veterinarian indicated that your pet might have a tendency to develop pancreatitis, you must be careful what is fed. Under "Causes of Pancreatitis," it was pointed out that hyperlipemia and high blood fat levels may contribute to the development of pancreatitis, therefore, high fat diets should be avoided. Long-term dietary management includes avoidance of fatty meals, treats such as table scraps, meat trimmings, or fat supplements.

Feed a maintenance diet of Prescription Diet Canine w/d or Canine i/d or Feline w/d. Obese pets should be placed on a weight reduction program. This may be accomplished with a diet such as Prescription Diet® Canine r/d® or Prescription Diet® Feline r/d®. (Ask your veterinarian about additional information for the treatment of obesity)

In addition to dietary management and fluids, there are certain drugs your veterinarian may recommend to help manage pancreatitis. Those drugs may include medication to help relieve the severe abdominal pain, antibiotics to prevent or treat pancreatic infections or abscesses, and/or drugs to decrease pancreatic secretions. If drugs are prescribed, please follow your veterinarian's instructions carefully. (See "How to Medicate Your Dog" or "How to Medicate Your Cat.")

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.

CHRONIC PANCREATITIS

In dogs, chronic pancreatitis is characterized by frequent bouts of acute pancreatitis. Pets 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.

Eventually, some dogs develop progressively more severe signs. Careful dietary management can alter these repeat episodes.

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. Some researchers report that chronic pancreatitis is more common in the male than in the female cat. Abdominal pain is not present in cats with pancreatitis. Most cats with pancreatitis suffer loss of appetite, weight loss and variable lack of energy. Many of them also urinate more often than usual. Abnormalities are not as consistent in the blood analysis of cats with pancreatitis as they are with dogs, which make the disease more difficult to diagnose in cats. Often, laboratory results from cats with chronic pancreatitis are normal.

DIETARY MANAGEMENT

Dietary management can help avoid pancreatitis in the dog and cat. If your pet has a predisposition to the development of pancreatitis or a history of pancreatitis, diets low in dietary fats, such as Prescription Diet Canine i/d and Prescription Diet Canine w/d and Feline w/d should be fed to your pet. If your pet is overweight, a weight loss program utilizing Prescription Diet Canine r/d or Feline r/d respectively should be initiated. If your pet suffers from hyperlipemia, a high fiber, low fat diet, such as Prescription Diet Canine w/d or Feline w/d, should be fed to your pet. Under no circumstances should your pet be fed treats such as meat or meat scraps that are high in fat. Talk to your veterinarian about the correct diet for your pet.

FEEDING DIRECTIONS

Follow your veterinarian's directions when feeding the prescription diet. Although these diets may not look like typical pet foods, most pets will readily eat these diets. If your pet is one of the few that doesn't readily accept the new diet after two days, you may want to try the following:

1. If the canned diet has been refrigerated, warm the food to, but not above, body temperature.
2. Hand feed the new diet for the first few days.
3. Mix the dry diet 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 diet with your pet's former food, gradually increasing the proportion of Prescription Diet until only the new diet is being fed.
5. Add one to three tablespoons of homemade clear, unsalted chicken broth to the prescribed diet.

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

SPECIAL HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR PET
