

## Treatment

- Pancreatitis is very painful – when it has been diagnosed one of the main aims of treatment is to control pain and prevent dehydration. For moderate to severe cases animals usually require hospitalisation; opioid medications will be needed to control the pain and intravenous fluids (a drip) to prevent further dehydration. • Management of nausea and vomiting is important as this allows a more rapid return to normal eating. Your pet with pancreatitis may not be vomiting – especially in chronic mild cases, however, anti-emetic medications (drugs that control vomiting and prevent nausea) are often used to maintain appetite. Antacids are also used to help reduce the stomach acid and reflux.
- Pancreatitis can recur; therefore steps need to be taken to prevent recurrence. The management of chronic pancreatitis involves avoidance of trigger factors, so usually requires adjustment to a long term specific fixed formula diet which is consistent. Avoid treats – use kibble from their usual diet as treats.
- Pancreatitis in dogs has been associated with high fat diets, it is important that this is considered when choosing treats or different foods. For cats, as they often have concurrent inflammatory bowel disease, a hypoallergenic diet may be used. If you are in any doubt about the best diet to choose, please talk to your vet.
- Some animals may be very severely ill with pancreatitis and will not recover despite treatment. Sadly in these cases euthanasia may be the kindest option to prevent suffering..

## Summary

Pancreatitis is an unpredictable condition and can have very different levels of severity.

Most animals will recover completely from a single episode only to require the avoidance of fatty meals. Some patients will require more intensive treatment and require hospitalisation to recover.

If you would like any further information about pancreatitis please ask the practice for advice.



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# PANCREATITIS IN DOGS AND CATS



The pancreas is an organ involved in digestion. It produces enzymes which help to digest food and neutralise stomach acid. Pancreatitis occurs when the pancreas becomes inflamed. When inflammation occurs, the digestive enzymes are released into the pancreas and surrounding tissues rather than being released into the guts. This causes severe pain as these enzymes start to digest the pancreas.

## Signs

Pancreatitis can be mild, moderate or severe. Animals with pancreatitis show a range of signs, including abdominal pain, diarrhoea and vomiting. Cats tend to show more variable signs and will often present with only lethargy and reduced appetite.

Acute pancreatitis can be very severe and life-threatening, the onset of signs is often sudden and dramatic. Some episodes of acute pancreatitis may be triggered by a high fat meal.

Chronic pancreatitis can be difficult to diagnose with signs waxing and waning and being relatively mild. Cats suffer from chronic pancreatitis more often than dogs.

## Clinical signs:

### Acute pancreatitis

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Refusing food
- Salivating (drooling)
- Severe abdominal pain – arched back, tucked up appearance, reluctance to lie down - may adopt the 'prayer position'
- Dehydration

### Chronic pancreatitis

- Intermittent vomiting
- Refusing meals occasionally
- Gurgling intestines
- Lethargy
- Abdominal pain
- Weight loss
- Dehydration

## Diagnosis:

Animals can have vomiting and diarrhoea for a variety of reasons so finding the cause of the problem may require several different investigations.

The diagnosis of pancreatitis is often made on clinical signs. However, sometimes it is important to do blood and urine tests to stage the disease. There is a specific blood test that can be performed which can tell you if there is inflammation in the pancreas. It is an accurate test and can be performed in house. Mild cases will not need any further investigations. More severe cases will need ultrasound scanning and/or X-rays to visualise the pancreas and tissues surrounding the pancreas and to help rule out any other causes or concurrent conditions which accompany the pancreatitis – e.g. reduced gut motility and/or gut ulceration. A definitive diagnosis is only achieved by taking a biopsy. As a biopsy requires a general anaesthetic, this is rarely done except in chronic cases.



## Why does pancreatitis occur?

- Pancreatitis results from a spontaneous inflammation of the pancreas. The inflammation spreads locally and can lead to peritonitis (inflammation in the abdomen).
- Pancreatitis can affect animals of any age, but it is more commonly found in middle-aged or older animals. Risk factors include:
  - A high fat diet/dietary indiscretion (mainly dogs)
  - Obesity
  - Secondary to hormonal conditions – e.g. Cushing's (dogs)
  - Severe dehydration/reduced blood volume
  - Trauma
  - Some medications
  - A high blood calcium (for any reason)
- Some breeds of dog are more susceptible than others. Miniature Schnauzers and Cocker Spaniels in particular seem to have a higher than average incidence of pancreatitis.
- Chronic pancreatitis is identified more frequently in cats and can be associated with inflammatory bowel syndrome (IBS) and hepatitis (liver inflammation). This condition requires specific management in the long term