

Heathcote Veterinary Clinic

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Hospital Hours
Monday to Friday 9.00am – 7.00pm
Saturday from 9.00am
Sunday 9.00am – 12.00pm

Pancreatitis

The pancreas gland is located in the abdomen tucked along the stomach & small bowel. It is responsible for producing enzymes that aid in the digestion of food. It also produces essential hormones such as insulin and enzymes inhibitor to stop the pancreas from digesting itself. If left untreated, this disease can be life threatening.

What is pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis can be defined as a severe, acute or chronic inflammation of the pancreas affecting both dog cats. This inflammation allows digestive enzymes to leak outside the pancreas causing intense pain and discomfort for the patient.

What causes it?

Table food and high fat diets resulting in hyperlipidemia seems to be one of the most consistent predisposing factors. Many dogs given meat scraps will develop pancreatitis eventually. It is a gamble and you never know when the small table scrap they are begging for will make them severely ill.

What are the contributing factors?

1. **Hyperlipidemia** - unusually high fat levels in the blood.
2. **Obesity**
3. **Trauma** - animals hit by a car, other abdominal injury or irritation caused by surgery can develop pancreatitis.
4. **Infection** - exposure to contaminated food or water
5. **Certain drugs**
6. **Chronic diseases** - diabetes mellitus, Cushing's, hypothyroidism, neoplasia
7. **Lifestyle** - older aged dogs, who live a sedentary non physical life, especially if they are overweight.

Signs:

Signs are more obvious in dogs.

- **Anorexia & vomiting** are the most common
- Abdominal pain and tenderness which may result in a praying stance
- Lethargy
- Diarrhoea
- Jaundice

In cats, the signs of pancreatitis are less obvious with lethargy and anorexia being the most common.

Diagnosis:

Pancreatitis is not always a straight forward diagnosis. It is diagnosed based on history, clinical signs, lab work and, sometimes, by actually looking at the pancreas with ultrasonography. A relatively recent lab test called a Spec cPL/fPL specifically measures inflammatory factors from the pancreas and can aid in the diagnosis and help evaluate response to treatment.

Treatment:

All animals with pancreatitis need to be hospitalized. It is a medical emergency and, if left untreated, can be life threatening. Most animals with pancreatitis are successfully treated in hospital. Here they are given IV fluids, pain medications, antibiotics, anti-nausea medications. The fluids help flush the toxins out of their system and help keep the animal hydrated. When they have improved enough to have oral medications and feel well enough to eat and drink they can have home care.

Even with successful treatment, your pet may be prone to further bouts of pancreatitis. The threat of recurrent pancreatitis can pose the same concerns as the original illness. This is why it is imperative that your dog/cat never receives any fatty foods for the rest of its life. Avoiding high fat foods will hopefully spare your dog/cat from a relapse of this dreaded disease.

Complications:

Some complications can arise from delayed treatment or severe pancreatitis. These may prolong the hospital stay or may result in death.

- Shock
- Ileus - decreased or no intestinal motility
- Liver disease
- Coagulopathies
- Myocardial disease
- Hypotension

How is Pancreatitis managed?

Initially, bland, low fat, highly digestible diets are fed. Usually small frequent meals are better than larger portions. Royal Canin Digestive Low Fat diet is often used at this stage. Fats need to be seriously restricted but if appetite is a problem a little boiled white chicken meat can be sparingly added to white rice for a little flavour. A key point is to go slow and to not feed too much. The pancreas needs a break and can be easily overwhelmed and inflamed again.

If an animal falls into a category of being prone to pancreatitis then we need to assess any contributing factors that we may be able to correct. Feeding a fat restricted, highly digestible diet has been shown to be the most important preventative and therapeutic treatment. Commercially prepared diets such as some in our Royal Canin range may be enough in some cases to prevent reoccurrence. If the animal is obese, the obesity needs to be addressed.

High fat foods such as pigs ears, schmaktos, liver and other dog treat with preservatives are to be avoided and instead feed low fat treats. Owner must reduce the amount of food their animal is fed. Not feeding table scraps, BBQ bits and basically normalizing eating patterns is the first step towards prevention. If drugs are a major contributor then reassessment of drug therapies may be indicated.