

Pancreatitis in Dogs and Cats

Introduction Pancreatitis is a serious and sometimes life-threatening condition that affects both dogs and cats. It occurs when the pancreas, an organ responsible for producing digestive enzymes and insulin, becomes inflamed. This inflammation can cause discomfort, digestive issues, and systemic complications if left untreated. Understanding the signs, diagnostics, and treatment options can help ensure the best outcome for your pet.

What is Pancreatitis? Pancreatitis is the inflammation of the pancreas, leading to improper digestion and potential damage to surrounding organs. It can be acute (sudden onset) or chronic (long-term), with varying degrees of severity. While the exact cause is often unknown, factors such as high-fat diets, obesity, certain medications, underlying health conditions, and genetic predisposition can contribute to the development of pancreatitis.

Symptoms to Watch for at Home

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Abdominal pain (pets may assume a "prayer position" with their front legs stretched out and rear end raised)
- Fever
- Dehydration

If your pet is exhibiting any of these symptoms, it is important to seek veterinary care promptly.

Diagnostics for Pancreatitis Diagnosing pancreatitis requires a combination of clinical signs, history, and diagnostic testing, which may include:

- **Bloodwork** – Elevated pancreatic enzymes, white blood cell count, and liver values may indicate pancreatitis.
- **Pancreatic-Specific Blood Tests** – Tests such as the canine/feline pancreatic lipase immunoreactivity (cPLI/fPLI) can help confirm the diagnosis.
- **Abdominal Ultrasound** – This imaging method helps evaluate the pancreas for inflammation and rule out other causes of illness.
- **X-rays** – While not definitive for pancreatitis, X-rays can help assess for other gastrointestinal conditions.

Treatment Options Treatment depends on the severity of the condition and is aimed at reducing inflammation, managing symptoms, and preventing complications. Common treatments include:

- **Hospitalization for Supportive Care**
If your pet is hospitalized here, we place an IV catheter, administer fluids, provide any necessary injections, and have a designated staff member responsible for monitoring and taking them out.
- **Pain Management** – Medications to control pain and discomfort.
- **Anti-Nausea and Anti-Vomiting Medications** – To help pets regain appetite and reduce gastrointestinal distress.

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- **Nutritional Support** – A low-fat, easily digestible diet is recommended for recovery.
- **Antibiotics** – Used if there is a risk of secondary infection.
- **Long-Term Management** – For chronic cases, dietary adjustments and ongoing monitoring may be necessary to prevent flare-ups.

Preventing Future Episodes of Pancreatitis While some causes of pancreatitis are unavoidable, there are several steps pet owners can take to reduce the risk of recurrence:

- **Feed a Low-Fat Diet** – Avoid feeding high-fat foods or table scraps, and provide a well-balanced, veterinarian-recommended diet.
- **Maintain a Healthy Weight** – Obesity can contribute to pancreatitis, so keeping your pet at a healthy weight is important.
- **Avoid Sudden Dietary Changes** – Gradually transition to new foods to prevent digestive upset.
- **Monitor for Early Symptoms** – If your pet has had pancreatitis before, be vigilant for early signs and seek veterinary care immediately if symptoms recur.
- **Limit Exposure to High-Risk Items** – Some medications, toxins, and foods (such as fatty meats) can trigger pancreatitis.
- **Regular Veterinary Check-Ups** – Routine health exams and bloodwork can help detect any early warning signs and allow for timely intervention.

If you suspect your pet has pancreatitis, please contact us immediately for evaluation and treatment. Early intervention is key to a successful recovery.

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