



Pancreatitis

The pancreas is an organ of the body that has many functions and roles. It is responsible for making insulin to help use sugars as a source of energy. The pancreas is also responsible for assisting with digestion of foods, particularly fats by creating enzymes that are needed for breaking down the foods we eat. The pancreas lies between the greater curvature of the stomach and the duodenum of the small intestine beside the liver in the front part of the abdomen.

Pancreatitis is the inflammation of the pancreas. Inflammation of the pancreas can occur acutely or be more chronic in nature.



Clinical signs of pancreatitis

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Painful abdomen: displayed as a prayer stretch or downward dog in dogs or curled in a tight ball in cats
- Hiding behavior
- Decreased appetite or anorexia
- Lethargy
- Some may present with vague or mild gastrointestinal signs



Acute versus chronic pancreatitis

Dogs will more commonly present with acute pancreatitis after the ingestion of a large fatty meal which overloads the pancreas and causes it to become inflamed. Acute pancreatitis can also occur spontaneously without any known trigger. Chronic pancreatitis will often have similar clinical signs but they may be less severe and with some good days and some bad days. Chronic pancreatitis is most commonly seen in cats but can be in dogs as well.

Patients with pancreatitis can sometimes have inflammation of the neighboring organs, including the liver causing a hepatitis and the intestines causing inflamed bowels. This is often referred to as Triaditis.



Who gets pancreatitis?

This disease is most commonly seen in middle aged dogs and cats. Although any breed can be affected, certain breeds seem to have a predisposition to acquiring pancreatitis such as terrier breeds, Miniature Schnauzers and domestic short-haired cats. Patients that are overweight or obese may have an increased risk.



Patients that have other endocrine disorders, such as diabetes, Cushing's disease or thyroid disease also have an increased risk of getting pancreatitis.

Diagnosis

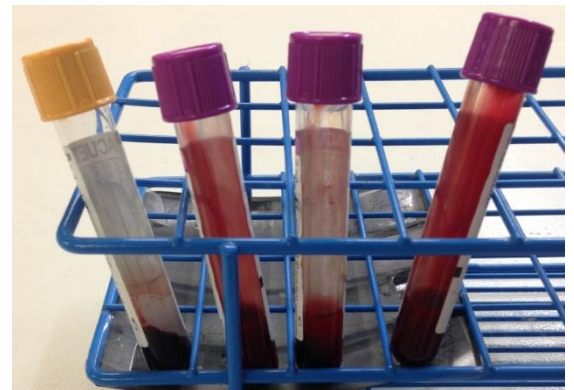
The first steps to diagnosing pancreatitis is laboratory analysis of blood. A complete blood count and biochemistry is performed. An elevation in more specific pancreatic enzymes such as amylase or lipase may lend the veterinarian to suspect pancreatitis. A cpli or fpli (canine pancreatic lipase immunoreactivity and feline pancreatic lipase immunoreactivity) tests can be sent to the laboratory or performed in hospital for more rapid answers. These tests are more specific when looking for pancreatic inflammation.

Imaging of the pancreas is a very good tool to assess for inflammation. An ultrasound is considered the "gold-standard" for diagnosis. Biopsies are rarely performed due to their invasiveness.

Treatment

Severely affected patients respond best with hospitalization, IV fluid therapy and supportive care medications to help stop the vomiting, diarrhea and to encourage them to eat again. If the patient has been anorexic for some time and does not eat with supportive care, a feeding tube can be placed to ensure they receive appropriate nutrition while they are recovering. Pancreatitis is a painful condition and therefore pain medications are often administered.

Some patients with less severe clinical signs or patients that are still eating and less painful can be treated at home with supportive medications, supportive nutrition and fluids under the skin to help maintain their hydration.



Nutrition is a very important part of treating pancreatitis as it is often high fat meals that has caused the inflammation or aggravated the pancreas in dogs. A low fat, easily digestible diet is recommended. Excellent diets for this include: Royal Canin's Gastrointestinal Low Fat canned food for dogs, Hill's i/d low fat for dogs and Purina's EN low fat for dogs. These diets have a maximum of 10% fat or lower. Low fat diets have not been found to be essential in cats, but an easily digestible diet such as gastrointestinal canned diets or hypoallergenic diets are recommended.



Common treatments for patients with pancreatitis

- Pain medications
- Antiemetics (stops the vomiting)
- Gastroprotectants or antacids
- Appetite stimulants
- Antibiotics
- Appropriate nutrition
- Fluid Therapy



What to expect/prognosis

Prognosis will depend on the severity of the disease and whether concurrent diseases are present. Dogs that are more sensitive or predisposed to pancreatitis or cats with chronic pancreatitis may have future bouts or recurring episodes. These patients should remain on the low fat gastrointestinal diets or appropriate gastrointestinal or hypoallergenic diets long term to reduce the chances of the pancreas becoming inflamed again. Owners may start to recognize the signs earlier and some of these patients may be treated at home for some of the milder episodes. Some patients, particularly those who

were witnessed having a large fatty meal (got into the leftover Christmas turkey etc.), may not have any further subsequent episodes if this is prevented in the future.

It can be scary to learn of a diagnosis of pancreatitis in a loved pet. Your veterinary team at Nanaïmo Veterinary Hospital wants to work with you to help improve your pet's quality of life. We want to work together to help you maintain the special bond you have with your pet. We are here to support you and your pet along this journey. Please contact us with any questions or concerns that you may have at 250-758-3985 or by email at nveth@shaw.ca

