

## PANCREATITIS

Pancreatitis is a relatively common cause of serious disease in middle aged and older dogs. Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. The pancreas is an organ located in the abdomen. It is attached to the first part of the intestinal tract, and is located in close proximity to the stomach and liver. It has two main functions; to produce insulin (necessary for the cells of the body to transport and use glucose for energy) and to produce digestive enzymes (to enable food to be digested properly). In most instances, when the pancreas becomes inflamed it affects the production and movement of digestive enzymes.

There are several different types of pancreatitis. Sudden (acute) pancreatitis occurs abruptly, and is usually associated with little or no permanent damage to the pancreas. This is the most common type of pancreatitis seen in veterinary medicine. Long term (chronic) pancreatitis is caused by continual inflammation. This can cause irreversible damage to the pancreas. Necrotizing pancreatitis is a severe form of pancreatitis leading to necrosis (death) of pancreatic tissue. Many affected patients will not survive.

Miniature schnauzers, miniature poodles and cocker spaniels have an increased risk of developing pancreatitis. In most cases, patients will be over 7 years of age. Overweight and obese dogs are much more likely to develop pancreatitis. There are a few diseases that can increase a patient's risk of developing pancreatitis, for instance dogs who already suffer from diabetes or cushing's disease (hyperadrenocorticism) are more inclined to get pancreatitis too.

Common symptoms of pancreatitis include vomiting, diarrhoea, lethargy, abdominal pain, dehydration and fever. Less common symptoms include jaundice (yellowing of tissues), mass lesions in the abdomen, breathing difficulties, bleeding disorders and an irregular heart beat.

It is not always possible to identify the cause of pancreatitis. However in the clinical setting, more than 50% of dogs who present with pancreatitis have a recent history of being fed (or stealing) fatty food(s) (eg fat offcuts from meat, fatty bones or rich 'human' food). Pancreatitis is common after Christmas, when many dogs are fed fatty leftovers. Other less common causes of pancreatitis include pancreatic trauma, lack of blood flow to the pancreas, certain drugs and pancreatic duct blockage or obstruction.

In very mild cases of pancreatitis, the dog may be treated as an out-patient. They would typically be treated with antibiotics and pain relieving medication, and put on a very bland diet. The majority of cases of pancreatitis do require some hospitalisation though. This would typically involve intravenous fluids, antibiotics, pain relieving medication and medication to prevent further vomiting. Once vomiting has stopped, patients will be fed a very bland diet. Once a patient has had pancreatitis, it is recommended that they be fed a low fat diet long term, as they may be predisposed to further bouts of pancreatitis.

If you suspect your dog may be suffering from pancreatitis, I would recommend taking them to visit a vet as soon as possible, as pancreatitis can be a severe, life threatening disease. If your dog is overweight or obese, especially if they are an at-risk breed, I would recommend weight reduction. Finally, as a veterinarian, I would never feed any of my pets fatty leftovers. As much as they love it, and it may seem a waste to discard the food, it is just not worth the risk of them developing serious health problems such as obesity or pancreatitis.

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