



Acute Pancreatitis in the Dog

The pancreas is one of the organs associated with digestion, including digestion of fat and also glucose control. It is located next to the small intestines, stomach and the liver in the front part of the abdomen. It contains granules of inactivated potent digestive enzymes that are activated when released into the intestines allowing the breakdown of food particles.

Pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas. This can occur if the inactivated granules are accidentally activated in the pancreas before being released. This causes auto digestion of the pancreas and is very painful. This often occurs after a fatty meal as persistently elevated levels of fat stimulate the release of pancreatic enzymes. It can also be secondary to pancreatic cysts, tumours or abscesses. It causes a variety of problems and in severe cases can lead to death.

What factors make it more likely your dog will develop pancreatitis?

While pancreatitis can occur in any dog, there are some factors that make it more likely to occur. These high risk animals include:

- certain breeds, such as Miniature Schnauzers, terriers, Labradors and huskies
- Those on high fat diets or who have recently ingested a high fat meal (sausages, bacon off cuts, bone marrow etc)
- Obese animals
- Middle aged animals
- Desexed females
- Those with underlying endocrine problem such as diabetes mellitus, Cushing's disease or hypothyroidism
- After recent trauma or surgery
- Those with high calcium levels.
- Those on some drugs particularly long term medications such as potassium bromide, prednisolone and frusemide.

What are the signs of pancreatitis that I might see at home?

There are a variety of signs, and often presents similarly to a gastroenteritis or intestinal blockage. Common symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Signs of nausea – lip smacking, drooling, inappetance
- “Praying stance” – stretching out the front legs on the ground and standing up with the back legs.
- Struggling to get comfortable when laying down
- Mild abdominal pain/off colour
- Dehydration and collapse.

What are the complications that can occur with pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis has a range of severities from mild abdominal pain and slightly off food through to severe pain, collapse and multi-organ failure. Due to its proximity to the



intestines, liver and stomach it can cause damage to these organs. The leakage of digestive enzymes can result in peritonitis (inflammation and infection of the abdominal cavity). It can also cause severe dehydration and secondary damage to the kidneys, shock, systemic illness and in severe cases death.

What can your vet do to confirm pancreatitis?

A general blood profile and a canine pancreatic specific lipase (cPSL) test, as well as a thorough clinical examination are often performed to test for pancreatitis. The pancreatic specific lipase test can occasionally miss some cases, so treatment may be instituted if clinically your dog appears to have pancreatitis even if the cPSL is within normal limits. An ultrasound and biopsy of the pancreas can also give further information about the severity of the damage and to rule out complications such as tumours or abscesses. It is essential in cases of protracted disease. Radiographs may also be recommended to rule out a foreign body.

What can your vet do to treat pancreatitis?

Depending on the severity of the disease and other organs affected. Most cases will require hospitalization for close monitoring, intravenous fluids (to prevent dehydration and rehydrate the body), pain relief and anti-nausea medication to stop them vomiting. Some cases will require antibiotics and mild cases may be managed at home. If there are complications such as liver problems then additional medication or tests may be required, but your vet will be able to discuss a thorough treatment plan for your dog's individual needs. During the recovery period and also long term, a low fat diet is critical to reduce the risk of further pancreatic insults.

What can I do to prevent pancreatitis?

A low fat diet, weight loss/prevention of obesity and regular veterinary checks to diagnose any other underlying diseases that can predispose to developing pancreatitis are the most important factors to helping reduce the risk of your dog developing pancreatitis.

There are several low fat diets such as Royal Canin Low Fat Gastrointestinal, Eukanuba intestinal low residue or Hills i/d which are ideal for long term maintenance to prevent pancreatitis. High fat "treats" such as marrow bones, left over sausages or bacon rinds should always be avoided.

Weight loss can also help prevent pancreatitis. A low fat diet, feed for their ideal weight, and regular exercise assist in weight control. Alternatively a weight loss specific diet such as Royal Canin Obesity, Eukanuba Weight Control or Hills r/d can assist in more rapidly removing excess kilos.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact your vet.