

FACT SHEET

Pancreatitis

The pancreas is an organ located close to the stomach with ducts (tubes) into the duodenum (small intestine) and is known as both an exocrine gland, secreting digestive enzymes into the small intestine, and endocrine gland, secreting hormones directly into the bloodstream.

Its exocrine role involves the release of digestive enzymes into the small intestine to break down proteins, fats, carbohydrates and acids; these enzymes are inactive until they enter the small intestine. There are a number of conditions and diseases associated with the pancreas including diabetes mellitus (insulin being one of its hormone secretions), exocrine pancreatic insufficiency and both acute and chronic pancreatitis.

Pancreatitis occurs when the enzymes required for digestion become active within the gland as opposed to only being activated on entering the small intestine; these digestive enzymes then begin digesting the gland tissue, resulting in inflammation.

Immediate veterinary advice is essential.

Symptoms

The symptoms of an attack include:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea – often blood stained
- Loss of appetite

The dog may adopt a 'praying' position to display these symptoms, with the hind quarters in a standing position but with the head and front legs being lowered to the ground in an effort to appease the pain and discomfort.

Other signs of discomfort may include panting, crying, restlessness, wincing when picked up, shaking or standing with an arched back. It is essential that nothing be fed or given by mouth during such an attack as the stimulus of any substance within the digestive tract will only serve to intensify the symptoms.

Whilst an attack can happen to any animal, it is more common in middle-aged to older female dogs with a higher incidence in the Miniature Poodle, Cocker Spaniel and Miniature Schnauzer.

Acute pancreatitis

This is where inflammation occurs rapidly and whilst mild cases can be successfully treated and managed long term, more severe incidents, or those left untreated can result in severe shock with high mortality.

Acute attacks may not have any long-term effects and are often associated with a fattier than usual meal being consumed. Subsequently, long-term management includes a fat awareness regime – lower fat diets, removal of scavenging behaviour, and smaller, more frequent meals.

The true cause of an individual acute pancreatitis attack often remains undetermined but veterinary consultation will often present factors that may have contributed to its onset and thereby assist in long term management and treatment to help prevent a reoccurrence.

Chronic pancreatitis

This is where a permanent abnormality of the pancreas has occurred and can include a long standing inflammation that has altered the normal structure and function of the pancreas gland. It can present itself as either acute inflammation or as persistent pain and malabsorption.

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The symptoms of chronic pancreatitis, whilst the same as an acute attack often results in large volumes of faeces being passed and weight loss as it is an ongoing condition.

Causes

There are many different causes of pancreatitis, and diagnosis can be difficult, however, the most common and known initiators of the condition include:

- Obesity – raised or abnormal levels of fat in the blood
- Trauma to the pancreas
- Decreased blood flow to the pancreas
- Toxins
- Medications
- Chronic kidney disease
- Infectious agents
- Pancreatic duct obstruction – gall stones
- Growths

Often the cause is undetermined, especially in acute attacks and veterinary guidance for long-term management and prevention is essential.

Immediate treatment

Treatment may take 3-4 days depending on the severity of the attack. Veterinary consultation is essential to re-establish blood volume and circulation within the gland, and prevent further stimulation of enzyme secretion. Water and electrolyte balance may also need restoring following diarrhoea and malabsorption symptoms. Quite often, nil-by-mouth for 3 days is required and this must be managed within a surgery environment as intravenous fluid administration would be essential.

Dogs that do not respond to therapy may require surgical exploration to establish how severe the inflammation of the pancreas or abdomen is, any bile or pancreatic duct obstructions, and any masses (abscess) or growths that may be present.

Long-Term management

Any dog that has experienced pancreatitis, whether acute or chronic, should be viewed as being predisposed to another attack and measures put in place to help prevent a reoccurrence.

Become familiar with the normal behaviour, gait and stance of your pet, and be extra vigilant following a meal, observing for any signs of discomfort: be aware of scavenging behaviour and prevent consumption of any foods other than your allocated diet: seal or prevent access to all bins and cupboards; keep under close control when out; advise friends, family and acquaintances not to feed any treats, explaining the serious health implications of such an act.

Feeding a consistent diet is essential, as variation in the nutrients will offer different stimuli to the digestive system.

Small frequent meals should be fed so as not to stress the Pancreas and stimulate large volumes of digestive enzyme secretion, in smaller breeds this may be up to 6 meals per day, in larger breeds, up to 4 meals per day.

Leave the dog out of the kitchen when cooking at home; dogs do not taste very well but are highly stimulated by smell and aroma; cooking smells, especially those of meat dinners, will stimulate appetite and salivation.

A reduced fat diet should be selected, as pancreatic episodes often follow the consumption of a fatty meal.

Regular veterinary check-ups are a necessity to monitor digestive health and pancreatic capabilities and to quickly diagnose any secondary conditions.

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How can Naturediet help?

All Naturediet menus are formulated to specific recipes, using consistent, high quality ingredients, providing complete and balanced nutrition for dogs and eliminating the need to fortify or supplement with other ingredients.

Naturediet Senior/Lite is a reduced fat recipe that will still satisfy the appetite and is extremely palatable. A blend of rabbit and turkey with vegetables and rice, the recipe contains a broad spectrum of amino acids, essential for muscle maintenance and repair, and the brown rice provides additional, slow release energy.

We recommend feeding small frequent meals in a 'Kong' toy; stuffing Naturediet into the hollow rubber ball results in the dog having to take his time to lick the content out; slowing consumption and reducing sudden ingestion and increased stimuli to the digestive tract. With no competition for food, the dog will often lie down to eat from the 'Kong', this is a very natural and relaxed position for digestion. The other advantage to feeding in this way is the satisfaction of 'fullness' that the dog has from a small meal; the slower they eat, the more satisfied they feel.

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