

Pancreatitis

Pancreatitis refers to inflammation of the pancreas, an organ within the abdomen that sits near the stomach. The pancreas is responsible for secreting hormones that control blood sugar, as well as releasing digestive enzymes into the small intestine that aid in the breakdown of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates.

Digestive enzymes released by the pancreas are only activated once they reach the GI tract. When the pancreas becomes inflamed, however, it begins to release activated digestive enzymes into surrounding tissue (and outside of the GI tract). These activated digestive enzymes can cause significant damage to the pancreas itself, as well as organs in close proximity to the pancreas.

In severe cases, the resulting inflammation from these enzymes triggers a massive systemic inflammatory response. In addition to GI upset (vomiting and diarrhea), pancreatitis can cause severe abdominal pain, blood clotting derangements, and distant organ damage (including injury to the kidneys, lungs, and heart).

Pancreatitis can be acute or chronic. Dogs with acute pancreatitis will often present with some combination of the following signs: vomiting, abdominal pain, inappetence, and lethargy. Cats may have more non-specific signs including lethargy and inappetence. In many cases, the specific cause of pancreatitis is not identified, though dietary indiscretion, medications and toxins, liver or gallbladder disease, GI disease, and genetic predisposition are among the risk factors cited. A definitive diagnosis of pancreatitis can be challenging, though blood tests and abdominal ultrasound can be helpful.

While pets with mild pancreatitis may respond well to outpatient therapy, many patients with moderate to severe pancreatitis require hospitalization. Treatment for acute pancreatitis is focused on IV fluid therapy, pain management, and GI supportive care.

Pets in whom chronic pancreatitis is suspected may have concurrent GI disease and benefit from a veterinary internal medicine consultation to discuss risk factors, diet modifications (low fat diet may be helpful in some patients), and long-term medications for pancreatitis and/or GI disease, if indicated.

Pancreatitis

Moderate to severe: We are concerned your pet may have pancreatitis, based on a combination of clinical signs, abdominal discomfort, and blood work. We strongly recommend transfer to an emergency and specialty hospital for further diagnostics and ongoing care. We have provided additional information on pancreatitis below.

Mild: We are concerned your pet may have pancreatitis, based on a combination of clinical signs, abdominal discomfort, and blood work. Because his/her signs are mild, we have provided your pet with outpatient treatments, but you should follow-up with your primary care veterinarian as soon as possible to ensure he/she is improving. If he/she worsens in any way, please seek emergent evaluation and treatment. We have provided additional information on pancreatitis below.

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