



Pancreatitis in dogs

Pancreatitis is a common condition to affect dogs. The pancreas is an organ in the abdomen that produces both insulin (to control the body's glucose levels), and digestive juices which help breakdown ingested fat. Excessive production of these digestive juices leads to excessive amounts of these juices in the body that can go on to start to digest the pancreas itself. The pancreas swells and becomes very inflamed which results in the symptoms of diarrhoea, vomiting and inappetence. It is a very painful condition that requires early diagnosis and effective treatment to try to halt the rapid progression of disease.

The classical cause of pancreatitis is ingestion of a fatty meal, such as table scraps or bacon rind. Middle aged, particularly female dogs, and smaller terrier or spaniel breeds appear particularly predisposed to this condition. It appears more prevalent in obese animals. Other causes are rarer, such as exposure to certain toxins, following surgery, with liver or kidney failure, or secondary to a pancreatic abscess or tumour.

If your pet shows the symptoms described above, your vet will want to clinically examine your pet. Pain when examining the front part of the abdomen may raise concerns about possible pancreatitis. Your pet may also have a temperature. Your vet may want to follow-up with a blood test to measure the levels of the pancreatic juices in the blood stream. A blood test can also try to eliminate other factors that may be aggravating the pancreas which may affect your pet's treatment plan. Depending on the results, and the symptoms your pet is exhibiting, your vet may also recommend an ultrasound examination of the abdomen to try to visualise the pancreas, and check for other contributing diseases. An ultrasound scan is a painless procedure that can be performed on a conscious patient – it uses sound-waves to produce a picture on a lap-top of the shape, size and texture of your pet's internal organs, just like you may have seen with a pregnancy scan. The probe cannot send sound-waves through fur however, and so your pet would require a small patch of fur to be shaved.

Following a diagnosis of pancreatitis, your pet will probably need to be hospitalised with us for a short time. This is because the painkillers that are strong enough to control this painful condition need to be given by injection, and also because most patients require an intravenous drip to help flush the toxins out of their system. Most patients are with us for 3 days. Once we have been able to stop their vomiting, small frequent meals of a very low fat diet are initiated. Your pet may also have some medication to help settle his or her tummy.

Once your pet is eating well, not vomiting and has no pain despite pain-killers being reduced or stopped, we will try to get him or her home with you as soon as possible. It is imperative however that your pet has no access to treats or scraps at home as any dog having had pancreatitis is prone to having a recurrence. Repeated bouts of pancreatitis are not only painful and debilitating for your pet, but can predispose to the development of diabetes over time. Your vet will be able to advise you on the long term dietary management but one of two diets are usually recommended:

- RCW low-fat gastrointestinal diet
- Chappie

Both of these are very low fat diets and should be fed as a sole diet with no added treats!