

Canine Pancreatitis

- Pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas, an organ in the abdomen that helps the body digest food.
- Acute pancreatitis can occur after a dog eats fatty food such as pork, beef, and some other human foods; dogs that get into garbage can develop pancreatitis.
- Treatment for pancreatitis is aimed at supporting the patient and minimizing the clinical signs until they resolve.
- After a dog recovers from pancreatitis, pet owners may be advised to feed a reduced-fat diet and discontinue any table food or other items that may contribute to future episodes of pancreatitis.

What Is Canine Pancreatitis?

The pancreas is an organ in the abdomen that is involved in helping the body digest food. The pancreas releases enzymes (proteins that are involved in chemical reactions in the body) into the digestive tract to help break down fats and promote digestion. When the pancreas becomes inflamed, the condition is referred to as *pancreatitis*.

When pancreatitis occurs, the pancreas releases enzymes and other substances into the surrounding area of the abdomen. These substances cause localized inflammation that damages the pancreas and nearby organs and can lead to life-threatening complications.

There are two forms of pancreatitis: acute (tends to occur suddenly) and chronic (tends to happen over time). Both forms can be mild or severe, and their clinical signs can be very similar. Although several types of events are known to cause pancreatitis, the underlying cause remains undetermined in many cases. Acute pancreatitis can occur after a dog eats a fatty food such as pork, beef, and some other human foods. Dogs that get into garbage can develop pancreatitis. Pancreatitis can also have other causes, including certain medications and some viral or bacterial infections. Dogs that are obese or have diabetes are at greater risk for developing pancreatitis. Miniature schnauzers may also be predisposed to the disease. Chronic pancreatitis can result from

repeated episodes of acute pancreatitis, but in most cases it is not clear what causes chronic pancreatitis.

What Are the Clinical Signs of Canine Pancreatitis?

The clinical signs associated with pancreatitis can be mild or severe, and the acute and chronic forms of the disease can look very similar:

- Vomiting
- Appetite loss
- Depression and lethargy (tiredness)
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Fever

Severely ill dogs may have a high fever, low blood pressure, and dehydration.

After a dog recovers from pancreatitis, pet owners may be advised to feed a reduced-fat diet and discontinue any table food or other items that may contribute to future episodes of pancreatitis.

How Is Canine Pancreatitis Diagnosed?

Obtaining information about your pet's medical history and performing a physical examination can provide your veterinarian with valuable information that can help determine if your dog may have pancreatitis. However, the diagnosis of pancreatitis can be complicated because there is no single test that can diagnose it in all cases. Initial diagnostic testing may include blood work such as a chemistry panel and complete blood cell count (CBC), radiographs (x-rays), and an abdominal ultrasound examination to look for any pancreatic abnormalities and rule out

Common Conditions

intestinal blockages and other causes for the clinical signs. There are also specific blood tests that, when combined with other supporting information, can help diagnose pancreatitis; your veterinarian may recommend specific testing if pancreatitis is suspected.

Treatment and Outcome

Canine pancreatitis can be challenging to treat. There is no treatment that reverses the condition, so therapy is aimed at supporting the patient and minimizing the clinical signs until they resolve. Antibiotics are commonly given (although not always), as well as medications to relieve vomiting and pain. Another aspect of treatment may involve “resting” the stomach and intestines to give them time to heal and rebound. Your veterinarian may recommend withholding food and water until the pet is no longer vomiting. During

that time, the patient can receive fluids by injection; some veterinarians provide additional nutrition through intravenous feeding (directly into a vein) or placement of a feeding tube. If the pet does not respond to medical treatment, there are also surgical procedures to treat pancreatitis.

The long-term outcome for a dog with pancreatitis can be difficult to predict. Severe pancreatitis can cause life-threatening damage to the body, including causing kidney failure, diabetes, and intestinal obstruction. If a pet recovers from an episode of acute pancreatitis, there may be concern that the problem will recur and become chronic. Sometimes, a permanent diet change to a reduced-fat diet may be recommended. Pet owners may also be advised to discontinue any table food or other items that may contribute to future episodes of pancreatitis.