

Feline Pancreatitis

- Pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas, an organ in the abdomen that helps the body digest food.
- In cats, the clinical signs of pancreatitis can be vague, such as appetite loss, dehydration, and lethargy (tiredness).
- Treatment is aimed at supporting the patient, including nutritional supplementation, and minimizing clinical signs; cats with chronic pancreatitis can experience recurring episodes of the condition.

What Is Feline 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). Compared with dogs, cats are more likely to have the chronic form of the disease. Both forms can be mild or severe, and their clinical signs can be very similar.

Abdominal trauma (such as being hit by a car) and infection with some viruses and parasites have been associated with the development of pancreatitis in cats. Inflammatory bowel disease has also been associated with pancreatitis in cats. However, in most cases, it is not clear what causes pancreatitis in cats.

What Are the Clinical Signs of Feline Pancreatitis?

Unlike dogs, many cats with pancreatitis do not vomit and don't exhibit obvious abdominal pain. The clinical signs associated with pancreatitis in cats may be

limited to appetite loss, dehydration, and lethargy (tiredness). Some cats with pancreatitis have very mild signs that seem to resolve on their own, so the condition may remain undiagnosed.

How Is Feline Pancreatitis Diagnosed?

Obtaining information about your cat's medical history and performing a physical examination can provide your veterinarian with valuable information that can help determine if your cat 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 rule out intestinal blockages and other causes for the clinical signs. Depending on your cat's health, your

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veterinarian may also recommend a surgical biopsy (removal of a tissue sample) to determine if your cat has pancreatitis. 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

Feline 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 fluids and medications to relieve pain. If the cat is vomiting, medications can be administered to relieve this problem. If a cat with pancreatitis has not eaten for

Common Conditions

several days, your veterinarian may recommend nutritional supplementation early during the course of treatment. Some veterinarians provide 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 cat with pancreatitis can be difficult to predict, especially if the problem

is chronic and likely to recur. Additionally, severe pancreatitis can cause life-threatening damage to the body, including peritonitis (an inflammation of the tissue lining the abdomen), hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease), kidney failure, and diabetes.

Cats with a history of pancreatitis should be monitored closely for evidence that the condition is recurring. Sometimes, a permanent diet change to a reduced-fat diet may be recommended.