

Park Veterinary Centre



Pancreatitis

Pancreatitis is an inflammatory disease of the pancreas. The pancreas is an organ that sits alongside the small intestine and is responsible for making and storing insulin (essential for maintaining blood glucose levels), and enzymes that are necessary for the digestion of food.

Causes of pancreatitis

Diet (low protein, high fat diet)

High blood fat content (triglycerides) which can be breed related, for example seen in miniature schnauzers

Infection

Drugs and toxins

Pancreatic duct blockage or trauma to the pancreas

Tumour

Symptoms of pancreatitis

Dogs with pancreatitis are usually depressed, vomit and are unwilling to eat. It can be a very painful condition. Some patients have relatively mild signs and can be managed with medication at home; others require hospitalisation and intensive treatment to manage the disease.

Cats can have far more vague symptoms and they usually present with a history of not eating. Vomiting and abdominal pain are less common finding in cats and they can just seem generally out of sorts.

Chronic pancreatitis can cause reoccurring symptoms, weight loss and can even result in diabetes if the damage in the pancreas is severe enough to affect the insulin producing cells.

Diagnosis

A suspicion of pancreatitis may be made based on clinical signs alone, but there are some tests that can be performed to aid the diagnosis. A blood test cPLI for dogs and fPLI for cats is available and we can get a result within a couple of hours. A positive result with the clinical signs makes this diagnosis very likely, but a negative result will not rule out the disease completely.

An ultrasound scan is often recommended to examine the pancreas and other organs in the area to search for an underlying cause.

Treatment

Usually hospitalisation is necessary to administer intravenous fluid therapy and other treatments particularly if the animal is not eating. Only in the mildest cases will we attempt to treat the animal at home with pain relief and usually antibiotic in case infection is causing the inflammation. Occasionally a feeding tube may need to be placed to enable us to feed the animal if they have not been eating for a long period of time.

Management

Once an animal has had pancreatitis they are at risk of further episodes. In order to reduce the risk of this a low fat diet is recommended and any high fat treats should be avoided. Some patients may be prescribed oral pancreatic enzyme supplement. Those patients with high triglycerides may require additional drugs to lower the blood fats.

Dietary management appears to be less important in cats and they are usually fed a normal diet.