

PANCREATITIS

Pancreatitis is a painful inflammation of the pancreas that can make pets extremely ill. The pancreas is an abdominal organ located just below the stomach that produces digestive enzymes to break down dietary fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. The pancreas also produces insulin, which helps move glucose from the blood into cells for energy production. Pancreatitis refers to the inflammation of the pancreas, and is caused by the activation of digestive enzymes within the pancreas due to pancreatic damage or blockage of its outflow duct. This results in “pancreatic auto-digestion”, whereby the enzymes destroy the pancreatic tissue. Pancreatitis can lead to dehydration, organ damage, diabetes, insufficient enzyme production, and, in severe cases, death.

[Acute pancreatitis](#) is defined as reversible pancreatic inflammation, while [chronic pancreatitis](#) refers to permanent changes in the pancreatic tissue. These two forms of pancreatitis cannot be differentiated clinically, although, signs in acute pancreatitis are usually more severe than those seen with chronic pancreatitis. Acute pancreatitis can quickly lead to systemic inflammation, shock and death - and must be treated aggressively. Chronic manifestations of pancreatitis include diabetes mellitus (30-40% of dogs with diabetes have pancreatitis) or loss of digestive enzyme production (exocrine pancreatic insufficiency).

[What causes pancreatitis in pets?](#)

Most pancreatitis cases occur after a pet eats a high-fat meal. Although resisting your pet’s puppy-dog eyes and drooling as you dig into a special dinner can be difficult, sharing food with your furry friend can be disastrous. Pancreatitis cases typically increase around the holidays, when families celebrate with festive meals. These fatty treats stimulate a sudden release of lipase (a pancreatic enzyme that helps fat digestion) and can cause internal pancreatic digestion, severe inflammation, and tissue damage. Toxins released from damaged tissue cause a systemic inflammatory response and severe illness.

Some breeds, including miniature schnauzers, are more likely to develop pancreatitis because of their pre-existing altered metabolism.

[What are the signs of pancreatitis in pets?](#)

- Lethargy
- Inappetence
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain

A pet who has clinical signs of vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours or who does not eat for 24 hours should be examined by a veterinarian immediately.

[How is pancreatitis diagnosed?](#)

The possibility that a dog may be suffering from pancreatitis is generally suspected on the basis of the history (i.e. loss of appetite, vomiting, etc.) and the finding of abdominal pain on examination by your vet. Routine blood tests can indicate infection or inflammation in the body, but they do not specifically test for pancreatitis, as many other diseases can cause these symptoms. Although routine blood tests can lead to a suspicion of pancreatitis, a specific blood test (called ‘canine pancreatic lipase’) needs to be performed to fully support the diagnosis. An ultrasound scan is very important in making a diagnosis of pancreatitis. In addition, an ultrasound scan can also reveal some potential complications associated with pancreatitis (such as blockage of the bile duct from the liver as it runs through the pancreas).

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT **PANCREATITIS** **IN DOGS**



[How are pets with pancreatitis treated?](#)

There is no specific cure for pancreatitis, fortunately though most dogs recover with appropriate supportive treatment. Most dogs with pancreatitis need to be hospitalized to provide treatment and necessary monitoring, however patients can sometimes be managed with medication at home if the signs are not particularly severe. Treatment for pets with pancreatitis typically includes aggressive rehydration with intravenous fluids and electrolytes during several days of hospitalization. Anti-vomiting and antidiarrheal medications can be used to treat symptoms, and pain medications can keep pets comfortable. It is very important to adequately control nausea and vomiting so the pet can resume eating as soon as possible to return the gastrointestinal tract to normal function. One of the most important aspects of treating pancreatitis is to ensure that the patient receives sufficient appropriate nutrition while the condition is brought under control. Recovering pets are usually fed a bland, fat-restricted diet for several weeks before gradually resuming their normal diets.

[How can pancreatitis in pets be avoided?](#)

Gastrointestinal upsets likely will occur whenever pets eat unusual food. Dangerous pancreatitis can develop, so stick to a normal diet and add pet-friendly treats occasionally. At holiday parties, don't give your pet fatty foods and tell guests that sharing with him is off-limits. Better yet, keep your pet away from the festivities so guests aren't tempted to slip him a treat. You also can leave out a bag of low-fat treats or fresh vegetables, such as baby carrots, for guests who can't resist befriending your pet with food.