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## **FELINE PANCREATITIS**

### ***What is pancreatitis?***

The pancreas is a vital organ which is located in the right side of the abdomen. It has two functions: 1) to produce enzymes which help in digestion of food and, 2) to produce hormones, such as insulin. When the pancreas becomes inflamed, the disorder is called pancreatitis. It is a disease process that is seen commonly in the dog and cat. There is no age, sex, or breed predisposition.

There are two main forms of acute (sudden onset) pancreatitis: 1) the mild, edematous form and, 2) the more severe, hemorrhagic form. A few cats that recover from an acute episode of pancreatitis may continue to have recurrent bouts of the acute disease. This is termed the chronic form. The associated inflammation allows digestive enzymes to spill into the abdominal cavity; this may result in secondary damage to surrounding organs, such as the liver, bile ducts, gall bladder, and intestines.

### ***What causes it?***

The cause of pancreatitis is not known. Certain drugs and toxins have been found to cause pancreatitis. Cats with inflammatory bowel disease have a higher incidence. There may be more than one cause and in most cases the cause is never identified.

Under normal conditions, the digestive enzymes produced by the pancreas are activated when they reach the small intestine. In pancreatitis, the enzymes are activated prematurely in the pancreas instead of in the small intestine. This results in digestion of the pancreas itself and, thus, the clinical signs begin. The clinical signs of pancreatitis are often variable, and the intensity of the disease will depend on the extent of organ involvement.

### ***What are the clinical signs?***

The diagnosis of pancreatitis is based on three criteria: clinical signs, laboratory tests, and ultrasound examination. The disease is typically manifested by anorexia and lethargy and may include nausea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea.

Some cats will have more subtle or subclinical disease. These cats may have episodes of the above mentioned symptoms or may have more general symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, and weight loss. These cats are especially hard to diagnose, as these symptoms may also occur with any number of other diseases

### ***How is pancreatitis diagnosed?***

Routine laboratory tests may reveal an elevated white blood cell count; however, in many cases it is normal. The elevation of pancreatic enzymes in the blood is probably the most helpful criteria in detecting pancreatic disease, but again, many cats with pancreatitis will have normal levels. There is a more specific test for pancreatitis, however, several days may be required to obtain an answer. Radiographs and ultrasound studies may show an area of inflammation in the location of the pancreas.

Unfortunately, many cats with pancreatitis will elude detection with any of these tests. Consequently, the diagnosis of pancreatitis may be tentative in many cases.

Recently a more sensitive blood test called a TLI has been developed. An abnormal TLI test is the best way to make a definitive diagnosis of pancreatitis in cats.

### ***How is pancreatitis treated?***

The successful management of pancreatitis will depend on early diagnosis and prompt medical therapy. The mild form of the disease is best treated by resting the pancreas from its role in digestion. The only way to "turn off" the pancreas is to withhold all oral fluids and food. This approach is accompanied by IV fluids to maintain normal fluid and electrolyte balance. In addition, antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs are sometimes administered. The presence of shock necessitates the immediate and intense use of intravenous fluids and systemic antibiotics.

### ***Will my cat recover?***

The prognosis depends on the extent of the disease when presented and a favorable response to initial therapy. Cats that present with shock and depression have a very guarded prognosis. Most of the mild forms of pancreatitis have a good prognosis.

### ***Will there be any long-term problems?***

There are three possible long-term results that may follow severe or repeated pancreatitis.

- 1)** If a significant number of cells that produce digestive enzymes are destroyed, a lack of proper food digestion may follow. This is known as pancreatic insufficiency and can be treated with daily administration of enzyme tablets or powder in the food.
- 2)** If a significant number of cells that produce insulin are destroyed, diabetes mellitus can result. This can usually be treated with daily injections of insulin.
- 3)** If the chronic form occurs, there may be repeated bouts of illness that are difficult to diagnose. These cats may have several days of poor appetite, fever, and lethargy. In some cases, diabetes mellitus can ultimately result from this form. However, most cats recover with no long-term effects.