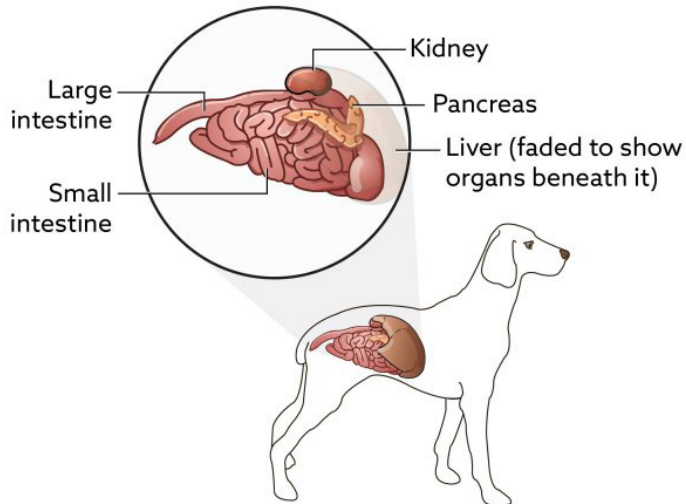


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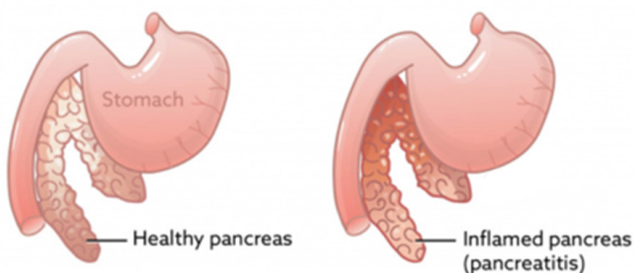
Pancreatitis (Dogs)

What is Pancreatitis?

The pancreas is a vital organ that lies on the right side of the abdomen next to the stomach. The pancreas produces enzymes to assist in food digestion and hormones such as insulin, which regulates blood sugar. The digestive enzymes are secreted into the small intestine, and the hormones enter the bloodstream.



Normally, pancreatic enzymes are produced in an inactive state and travel through the pancreatic duct to the duodenum, part of the small intestine. Once they reach the small intestine, they are activated to begin digestion. With pancreatitis, these enzymes are activated prematurely in the pancreas instead of in the small intestine. In this case, the pancreatic enzymes start to digest before they should. This results in digestion of the pancreas itself causing variable degrees of inflammation.



Pancreatitis commonly occurs in the dog. There is no age or sex predisposition. Schnauzers, especially miniature Schnauzers, may be more prone to pancreatitis due to high blood fat levels. Pancreatitis may be acute or chronic.

Acute pancreatitis may either take a mild, oedematous form or a more severe, haemorrhagic form. The associated inflammation allows digestive enzymes from the pancreas to spill into the abdominal cavity resulting in secondary damage to the liver, bile

ducts, gall bladder, and intestines. In severe cases it can cause life threatening peritonitis. A few dogs that recover from an acute episode of pancreatitis may continue to have recurrent bouts of the disease, which is then called chronic or relapsing pancreatitis.

The exact cause of pancreatitis is not known, although it may be triggered in some cases by a fatty meal or corticosteroid administration. However, in many cases it appears to occur spontaneously.

What are the Clinical Signs of Pancreatitis?

The most common clinical signs include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- fever
- lethargy
- abdominal pain
- diarrhoea
- decreased appetite

During an attack, dogs may take a 'praying position', with their rear end up in the air while their front legs and head are lowered onto the floor. If the attack is severe, acute shock, severe depression, and even death may occur.



Diagnosis

Diagnosis of pancreatitis is made on a combination of clinical signs, increased white blood cell counts and elevated pancreatic enzyme levels. Ultrasound studies often provide a diagnosis of pancreatic inflammation or local peritonitis caused by this condition. Unfortunately, some dogs with pancreatitis, especially chronic pancreatitis, will escape detection with many of these tests. Consequently, the diagnosis of pancreatitis may be tentative or presumptive in some cases and based solely on clinical signs and medical history.

Treatment

The successful management of pancreatitis will depend on early diagnosis and prompt medical therapy. With mild, oedematous pancreatitis, the treatment is supportive, by 'resting' the pancreas and allowing the body to heal itself.

Dogs with more severe disease will require hospitalisation for more intensive care including intravenous fluids, pain relief and medication to control vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

Dogs recovering from pancreatitis must be fed an ultra-low fat diet for six weeks to allow the pancreas to fully rest and recover. A fasting triglyceride test after this period will determine whether a lifelong low fat diet will be necessary. It is very important to strictly adhere to this diet.

Prognosis

The prognosis depends on the severity of the disease when diagnosed and the response to initial therapy. Dogs that present with shock and depression have a very guarded prognosis. Most of the mild forms of pancreatitis have a good prognosis with aggressive treatment. Dogs that are not treated may progress to the haemorrhagic form and suffer severe consequences, including sudden death.

