

PANCREATITIS

This is an inflammatory condition of the pancreas which can be divided into acute and chronic types. Acute pancreatitis tends to occur abruptly but leave little permanent pathologic change whereas in chronic pancreatitis there is continuing disease which often leads to irreversible morphologic change.

The pancreas secretes enzymes involved in digestion. When the organs defense mechanisms are affected these enzymes can lead to autodigestion of the pancreatic tissue. Through local and systemic tissue injuries there may be multi-organ involvement.

Breed predilections include miniature schnauzers, miniature poodles, cocker spaniels and siamese cats. Acute pancreatitis is commonly seen in middle aged animals-6-7yrs or older.

Causes

The inciting cause is often unknown. The following factors should be considered – breed, obesity, intercurrent disease (diabetes, hyperadrenocorticism, renal failure, neoplasia), diet (especially if high in fat), infectious agents, drug administration.

Clinical signs

Lethargy, depression, anorexia. Vomiting (less common in cats), abdominal pain, diarrhoea (more common in dogs). Dehydration and pyrexia. Jaundice (more common in cats). Other systems can be affected causing respiratory distress, bleeding disorders and cardiac arrhythmias.

Diagnosis

Clinical signs coupled with blood tests and radiographs can help to rule out other causes but ultrasound is the way in which we typically confirm pancreatitis. This also shows us whether it is acute or chronic, oedematous or necrotising). Amylase and lipase levels (measured from blood samples) used to be the way in which this disease was diagnosed but false negatives and positives occur so we can not rule out pancreatitis on the basis of blood results.

Treatment

Patients usually require hospitalisation for intravenous fluid therapy (3-5days is common). Food is often with-held initially to reduce pancreatic secretions although current trends are swinging towards maintaining oral nutrition. Pain relief, antibiotics and anti-emetics are indicated where clinical signs or blood results suggest they are necessary. There is the possibility of complication including diabetes, pancreatic insufficiency or other organ involvement which can be life threatening (pulmonary oedema, cardiac arrhythmias, generalised peritonitis, DIC, hepatic lipidosis in cats). Short or longer term recurrence of pancreatitis is common.

Prevention

Weight reduction, avoidance of high fat diets, avoid use of drugs which can precipitate disease.

Prognosis

Fair with oedematous pancreatitis especially if responding to symptomatic treatment. More guarded with necrotising pancreatitis or when there is multi-organ involvement.