

Pancreatitis in Dogs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



FUNCTIONS OF THE PANCREAS

The pancreas is a small, v-shaped structure located near and attached to the wall of the small intestine. This important organ has two major functions: It produces insulin to aid the body in the absorption of glucose and other carbohydrates. A dysfunction in this part of the organ's work, when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, causes diabetes mellitus. Its other essential function is that it produces powerful enzymes that aid in the absorption of fats and proteins in digestion. These enzymes travel from the pancreas to the small intestine via a small tube called the pancreatic duct.

WHAT CAUSES PANCREATITIS?

Factors, including diseases, medications, infections, obesity, trauma, a high-fat diet, table-scrap feasting, or greasy "people" food (such as that during the holidays) can cause a dog's pancreas to become inflamed. Middle-aged dogs and [Yorkshire Terrier](#) and Schnauzer breeds are particularly prone, but any dog can develop it.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PANCREATITIS?

Dog owners should suspect a problem with the pancreas if their pet has a fever, reduced appetite, appears to have a painful abdomen, is showing signs of depression and dehydration, is vomiting and/or passing yellow, greasy diarrhea. Do not hesitate to seek medical help. Your veterinarian will take a detailed history, conduct a physical exam, and do blood tests to check pancreatic enzyme levels. A white blood cell count, x-rays, and ultrasound tests may also be required. Initial treatment focuses on withholding intake of food (to rest the pancreas), managing/relieving the pain, establishing proper fluid and electrolyte balances, preventing infection, and controlling possible complications.

WHAT IS THE PROGNOSIS?

Dogs with severe pancreatitis can recover but may then develop fatal complications. In severe cases, pancreatitis can have permanent effects, such as the development of diabetes mellitus or loss of pancreatic enzymes needed for proper digestion. Pets that have repeated bouts of pancreatitis may need to be fed [low-fat diets](#) to prevent recurrence. Even so, some animals develop chronic pancreatitis, which can lead to diabetes and/or pancreatic insufficiency, also called maldigestion syndrome. Most dogs with mild pancreatitis make a successful recovery with prompt treatment and adherence to the veterinarian's diet recommendations. Although dogs can get pancreatitis from other conditions, it is a good policy to prevent your dog from eating holiday goodies. Make sure there are no unguarded "treats" on the counter (if you have a bigger dog) or under the tree where the easy access would be sure to result in your dog's overindulgence and possible problems with the pancreas.

