

# PANCREATITIS



Eos, a Favourite Greyhound, the Property of H.R.H. Prince Albert; Landseer, Sir Edwin Henry (1802-1873); 1841

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Pancreatitis is an inflammatory disease of the pancreas. The pancreas is a finger-sized, spongy, flesh-colored gland that sits beside the small intestine in the abdomen. Its job is to manufacture and secrete digestive enzymes and insulin. When stimulated by the animal swallowing food, digestive enzymes are released into the small intestine. Think of pancreatitis as the pancreas trying to digest itself. Pancreatic tissue damaged by autodigestion can become infected and even necrotic (dead).

Pancreatitis is no more peculiar to greyhounds than to any other breed. In fact, the poster dog for pancreatitis is the miniature schnauzer due to its high incidence of hyperlipidemia - a condition of inordinate amounts of fat in the blood - "doggie high cholesterol," if you will. Not surprisingly, the schnauzer also has an increased incidence of diabetes, caused by a dysfunctional pancreas that doesn't make enough insulin.

Some cases of pancreatitis have no cause that can be readily identified. An equal number can be directly traced to the dog consuming greasy or fatty food. Sometimes it's a whole tub of butter, other times, a single scrap of steak. Nobody really knows why you can add a little bacon grease to a dog's food regularly and then one day - BAM! - pancreatitis. Don't take the chance.

Pancreatic infection is more dangerous than infection within the gastrointestinal tube (stomach, intestines) because the pancreas sits free in the abdomen. Surrounding organs may become contaminated, resulting in peritonitis (infection of the entire abdominal cavity), which has a high mortality rate. Pancreatitis can lead to kidney failure and DIC, an endstage bleeding disorder triggered by a variety of conditions from parvo to heatstroke. DIC stands for disseminated intravascular coagulation - a.k.a. Death Is Coming, Dead In Cage, Dog In Cooler, etc.

Signs of pancreatitis are loss of appetite, lethargy, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and a painful abdomen. Not every dog has every sign. Cases vary from mild to life threatening. In serious cases, the belly is tender to the touch.

The classic case has milky appearing serum due to the high amount of fat in the blood (lipemia). Other lab findings are a high white blood count, high amylase and lipase, and possibly a high BUN, liver enzymes, and / or glucose. Electrolyte derangements are common as

a result of prolonged vomiting.

The cornerstone of treatment is to get the dog off all oral intake (including water) to reduce pancreatic stimulation. This necessitates intravenous fluids until vomiting has stopped and the dog is able to keep down food and water again, typically several days. Antibiotics and anti-vomit medicines are usually needed.

Recovering pancreatitis dogs are placed on a bland lowfat diet. Most can be weaned back to their regular dog food, assuming it has a reasonable fat and protein content. Severe cases are best kept on lowfat food forever. Any dog that has suffered through a bout of pancreatitis should never again be fed anything fatty or greasy in any amount as they are at increased risk for recurrence.