

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE



(IBD) and chronic intestinal inflammation

What Is IBD?

IBD refers to inflammation of the intestine which disrupts your pet's normal bowel habits.

What Causes IBD?

In some cases the cause of the condition is unknown. In these cases, it is thought that the animal's immune system is mounting an inflammatory response against its own intestinal bacteria. Other potential causes of intestinal inflammation in dogs and cats include parasites such as Giardia; fungal and bacterial agents; allergies to food; foreign bodies, such as bones or plastic, that have been swallowed; and stress, cancerous conditions and abnormal blood supply to the intestines.

What Are the Clinical Signs of IBD?

The most common symptom is large volumes of semi-formed to liquid faeces. Some dogs will pass dark, tarry stool (melena), which is partially digested blood. Weight loss is common and is due to malabsorption of nutrients, but it is more severe if the animal has a reduced appetite. Vomiting and abdominal discomfort can occur, and there may be concurrent colitis (inflammation of the colon), which is apparent from repeated effort and straining to defecate.

How Is IBD Diagnosed?

If your veterinarian suspects that your pet has IBD, they will perform a thorough physical exam including abdominal palpation (evaluation of the organs by touching with the fingertips through the body wall). Diagnostic tests likely include examination of stool samples for parasites, blood tests to investigate the possibility of other conditions which have secondary effects on the gut such as liver and kidney function tests, measure blood vitamin levels (typically vitamin B12), to identify intestinal damage and any deficiency that needs treating, X-rays of the digestive tract, abdominal ultrasound, endoscopy (examination of the intestine with a flexible camera under general anaesthesia) with biopsy, and occasionally, surgical exploration of the abdomen. The latter two are the only method to obtain an intestinal biopsy which can help to achieve a diagnosis. A refined diagnosis is important in order to decide whether to begin long-term treatment for IBD, versus identifying another disorder which produces similar symptoms but requires very different medication.

How Is chronic intestinal inflammation treated?

The aim is to treat the underlying condition if possible. For example, if intestinal parasites are diagnosed, then your veterinarian is likely giving treatment intended to eliminate them. Many patient's symptoms will either resolve or improve following a diet change. Typically, a diet containing proteins your pet hasn't been exposed to before or hydrolysed protein diets are recommended. If inflammatory bowel disease is diagnosed, then dietary modification and/or administration of oral medications are typically recommended. The most commonly used medication is steroids, although sometimes other anti-inflammatory medications such as ciclosporin are used. Vitamin supplements may be indicated, and sometimes probiotics are helpful. No two individuals with IBD respond exactly the same way to treatment, so a stepwise approach is the best treatment for your pet.

What Is the Prognosis for My Dog?

Some cases of IBD can be well managed, and many pets have the condition for the rest of their lives. Most cases can be managed with medication and special foods, whereas a small number of very severe cases do not respond to treatment and continue to have digestive problems. You should always follow your veterinarian's instructions carefully when you take your pet home. You should monitor your pet's condition, call your veterinarian if you have any concerns and return to the hospital for scheduled follow-up appointments and diagnostic studies. This allows any changes to be detected early and modifications of treatment to be implemented quickly.



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