



VRCC, Internal Medicine Department
3550 S. Jason St. Englewood, CO 80110
Direct Line: 303-874-2055
www.vrcc.com

Pancreatitis in Cats

Cats can develop acute pancreatitis characterized by severe inflammation and systemic consequences similar to dogs (please see “Acute Pancreatitis in Dogs” handout). Acute pancreatitis in cats may be secondary to infectious diseases such as Toxoplasmosis or may be idiopathic (no known etiology can be found). However, the majority of cats that develop pancreatic inflammation have chronic pancreatitis. Chronic pancreatitis in cats is caused by immune-mediated inflammation within the pancreas. The cause of this inflammation is largely unknown and can be accompanied by inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract (inflammatory bowel disease) and inflammation within the liver (cholangiohepatitis). The combination of chronic pancreatitis, inflammatory bowel disease, and cholangiohepatitis is sometimes referred to as “triaditis”.

Clinical signs of chronic pancreatitis can be vague and non-specific. These include intermittent although occasionally severe vomiting, inappetence, weight loss, fever, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. Labwork findings are non-specific and may include elevated white blood cell counts and elevated liver enzymes. Amylase and lipase, the routine pancreatic enzymes found on most laboratory panels, have been shown to be non-diagnostic in cats.

As in dogs, the diagnosis of chronic pancreatitis can be elusive and sometimes more difficult to diagnose than acute pancreatitis. A high index of suspicion is required to diagnose this syndrome in cats. Abdominal ultrasound can be helpful, however, in the literature, only 11-67% of cats with pancreatitis will have an abnormal looking pancreas on ultrasound. We believe that this number is a bit low as our equipment and expertise has improved over the years. The most sensitive and specific diagnostic test is a blood test called the feline pancreatic lipase immunoreactivity (FPLI), which picks up approximately 90% of the cases. This test confirms the diagnosis as well as serves as a baseline to help assess response to therapy.

The goal of therapy for feline chronic pancreatitis is to suppress the abnormal inflammation within the pancreas. The drug of choice is the steroid prednisolone. Since steroids can have side effects (diabetes, congestive heart failure, and suppression of the immune system), an accurate diagnosis is necessary prior to institution of steroid therapy.

Prognosis for chronic pancreatitis, in general, is quite good with the majority of patients doing well on steroid therapy. However, cats with chronic pancreatitis require therapy with steroids for

the rest of their life, although we can usually taper the drug down to low-dose daily or every-other-day therapy. Prognosis can be worse with concurrent inflammatory bowel disease or cholangiohepatitis and these diseases may require further work-up with endoscopy or liver biopsy.