

Pancreatic Conditions

The most common ailments of the pancreas include:

- Pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) – acute or chronic
- Pancreatic insufficiency, also known as malabsorption

For more information, please visit
www.felineoutreach.org.



Feline Outreach Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the care of companion animals, specifically cats.

The information contained is for general informational purposes only, and is no substitute for your own research or the advice of a veterinarian.

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Pancreatic Problems



Treatment of
feline pancreatitis
and pancreatic
insufficiency





Diseases of the Pancreas

The pancreas' role is to produce hormones, such as insulin, and digestive enzymes. Pancreatitis is a condition where the pancreas becomes inflamed and digestive enzymes may leak from the pancreas and attack other organs, such as the liver. While it's unclear whether pancreatitis may cause diabetes mellitus, or vice versa, best estimates are that 30% to 50% of diabetic cats also have chronic pancreatitis. Pancreatitis often occurs along with inflammatory bowel disease and cholangiohepatitis, a condition known as triaditis. Pancreatic insufficiency, also known as malabsorption, is a condition where the enzymes released aren't enough to digest food properly.

The conditions may occur concurrently.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Causes of pancreatic ailments are largely unknown. They are also typically difficult to diagnose. Some cats suffering from pancreatitis exhibit vomiting or abdominal pain. Abdominal pain may be indicated by the cat crying out when picked up, or frequently lying in what many caregivers refer to as a "meatloaf" position, hunched over with all four legs tucked under the body. Stools from a cat with pancreatic insufficiency may be yellow or gray in color.

A newer blood test, the Pancreatic Lipase Immunoreactivity (PLI) test, can be useful in diagnosing pancreatic ailments, but may produce normal results unless an attack is underway when the test is performed. Ultrasounds are sometimes useful, but the pancreas is so small it's often difficult to see abnormalities unless the inflammation is very severe. The only definitive way to rule out pancreatic ailments is a necropsy.

Treatment

As causes are largely unknown, treatment focuses on managing symptoms. Sub-cutaneous (sub-q) fluids maintain hydration, and may be administered at home. Digestive enzymes may assist the body in digesting food, but they may also exacerbate enzyme leakage from the pancreas. If enzymes are utilized, powdered enzymes seem to work better than other forms. Enzymes are often administered in conjunction with an antacid, such as famotadine (Pepcid AC). Supplementation with B-12 (cobalamin), folate, and other B vitamins may be helpful. In some cases, pain medications or other drugs may be necessary.

Cats with pancreatic insufficiency (malabsorption) generally do best on low-fiber diets. While a low-fat diet seems to work best for dogs and humans with pancreatitis, there's no scientific evidence to indicate the same for cats. However, some caregivers report that a lower-fat diet seems to benefit their cats. As carnivores, cats are most suited for a low-carbohydrate diet, and tolerate animal fats well. As pancreatitis occurs so often in conjunction with diabetes, and diabetic cats do best with an all-wet low-carbohydrate diet, and cats with pancreatic insufficiency do best on a low-fiber diet, it may be best to feed cats with pancreatitis a highly-digestible all-wet (canned or raw) low-carbohydrate/low-fiber diet. Monitor your cat to see what foods it seems willing to eat and seem to make it most comfortable.

Finally

Pancreatic ailments often occur in conjunction with diabetes mellitus, gastro-intestinal disorders such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and liver disorders. Proper nutrition may be the best way to manage these ailments, and perhaps even prevent them.

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