

Pancreatitis in Dogs and Cats

What Is Pancreatitis?

The pancreas is a small but powerful organ located near the stomach and intestines. It helps with digestion by producing enzymes and also regulates blood sugar by releasing insulin.

Pancreatitis means inflammation of the pancreas. When the pancreas becomes inflamed, those digestive enzymes can leak out and start damaging the pancreas and nearby tissues, causing pain and illness.

Pancreatitis can be **acute** (sudden and severe) or **chronic** (slowly developing and recurring over time).

What Causes Pancreatitis?

In many pets, the exact cause is unknown. However, several factors can increase the risk, including:

- Eating fatty or rich foods (a common trigger in dogs)
- Obesity
- Certain medications
- Trauma to the abdomen
- Hormonal diseases (such as diabetes or Cushing's disease)
- In cats, underlying liver or intestinal disease is often linked

Sometimes pancreatitis happens spontaneously, even in otherwise healthy pets.

Signs of Pancreatitis

Dogs

- Vomiting (often repeated)

- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain (may cry or hunch their back)
- Lethargy or weakness
- Diarrhea
- Fever

Cats

Cats often show more subtle signs:

- Decreased appetite or not eating
- Lethargy or hiding
- Vomiting (less common than in dogs)
- Weight loss
- Dehydration

Because symptoms can vary and overlap with other conditions, **a veterinary exam is essential** for diagnosis.

How Is Pancreatitis Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will start with:

- A **physical exam** and discussion of your pet's history
 - **Blood tests** to check pancreatic enzyme levels and look for inflammation
 - **Ultrasound imaging** to assess the pancreas and nearby organs
 - Sometimes additional tests to rule out other diseases
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Treatment of Pancreatitis

There's no single cure, but treatment supports the body while the pancreas heals. This may include:

- **Hospitalization for IV fluids** to correct dehydration and maintain circulation
- **Pain relief and anti-nausea medications**
- **Nutritional support** — in mild cases, pets may go home with an easily digestible diet (that is also low in fat for dogs). In more severe cases, they may need to be fed through a feeding tube until they recover.
- **Antibiotics** only if infection is suspected
- **Monitoring** for complications such as diabetes or liver changes

Most pets improve within a few days to a week with proper care.

Long-Term Management and Prevention

After recovery, your veterinarian may recommend:

- **Feeding a low-fat diet (for dogs)**
- **Avoiding table scraps and high-fat treats**
- **Maintaining a healthy body weight**
- **Regular checkups** to monitor for recurrence or related conditions

Cats with chronic pancreatitis may need ongoing management for concurrent issues like inflammatory bowel disease or liver inflammation.

When to Seek Veterinary Care

Contact your veterinarian immediately if your pet:

- Vomits repeatedly

- Refuses food for more than 24 hours
- Seems painful or unusually lethargic
- Has a history of pancreatitis and begins showing similar signs again

Prompt treatment greatly improves the chances of a full recovery.

Key Takeaway

Pancreatitis can be serious, but with early diagnosis, supportive care, and dietary management, most dogs and cats recover well. If you notice changes in your pet's appetite, energy, or comfort, your veterinarian is your best partner in keeping them healthy.