



Associated Veterinary Specialists, PC, LTD

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Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a condition caused by the excessive infiltration of inflammatory cells into the normal walls of the gastrointestinal tract (stomach, small intestine and/or large intestine). These inflammatory cells disrupt the normal architecture of the intestines and interferes with digestion and the absorption of nutrients.

Inflammatory bowel disease is a complex disease and can be caused by many different factors. Some of the common causes include food allergies, an allergic response to intestinal parasites, infectious agents (bacteria, fungus and protozoa), cancer, and immune mediated causes. Immune mediated disease is the most common cause identified in dogs and cats. During this condition, the immune system thinks that the normal intestinal cells are “foreign” and attacks them, leading to inflammation. It is possible that underlying triggers such as food allergies or another cause listed above stimulates the immune system, leading to the attack. If a trigger for immune mediated disease cannot be identified, the inflammatory bowel disease is described as “idiopathic”. Idiopathic inflammatory bowel disease is the most commonly diagnosed form in dogs and cats.

The clinical signs for inflammatory bowel disease can vary based on the individual patient and the part of the gastrointestinal tract that is affected. Common clinical signs may include the following:

- Poor appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (with or without blood)
- Weight loss
- Increased flatulence

In cats, inflammatory bowel disease may also involve the pancreas and/or liver.

The diagnosis of inflammatory bowel disease involves a series of steps to look for an underlying cause and ultimately obtaining biopsies for a definitive diagnosis. Common diagnostic tests that may be recommended include the following:

- Fecal testing
- Food trials
- Blood tests (Complete blood count, chemistry panel, urinalysis)
- Abdominal radiographs
- Abdominal ultrasound
- Ancillary tests (ex. Vitamin B12 & folate levels, infectious disease titers)

The definitive diagnosis is obtained with biopsies which may be collected surgically or via endoscopy. With endoscopy, a flexible tube that contains a camera on the end is introduced into the intestinal tract. After



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visualization of the intestines, biopsy samples are collected from the surface of the intestines. With surgical biopsies, abdominal surgery is performed to obtain the biopsies of the intestines. Your veterinarian will discuss in detail the best option for obtaining biopsies from your pet.

Treatment of inflammatory bowel disease is guided by the section of the gastrointestinal tract that is affected, severity of the disease and the results of the biopsies. Some of the more common therapeutic approaches may include the following:

- Deworming medications
- Diet alterations
- Vitamin supplementation
- Probiotic therapy
- Antibiotic therapy
- Immunosuppressive therapy

Treatment of inflammatory bowel disease is tailored to best fit each patient and patience is often required to determine the best therapeutic course for your individual pet.

Since there are so many different variables at play in a pet with inflammatory bowel disease, it is difficult to give owners an accurate prognosis. In general, each patient is unique in their response to therapy and some pets may be able to be cured of their disease and others may require life long therapy. It is important to remember that this disease requires patience, frequent rechecks and communication with your veterinarian in order to optimize the control of the disease.

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Reference: Animal Emergency & Specialty Center