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## Pancreatitis

Pancreatitis is a disease process commonly found in dogs and cats. The pancreas is a pale pink glandular organ that nestles cozily just under the stomach and along the duodenum. As a glandular organ, the pancreas is all about secretion and it has two main jobs: the first job is the secretion of digestive enzymes to help break down food, the second job is the secretion of insulin and glucagon (to regulate sugar metabolism).

In pancreatitis, inflammation disrupts the normal integrity of the pancreas. The cause of this inflammation is often never known, but breed factors, age, diet and metabolic processes can be involved. The eating of fatty bones or spicy food is frequently the cause in dogs, and inflammatory bowel disease is frequently involved with cats. Digestive enzymes that are normally safely stored in granules are released prematurely where they digest the body itself. The result can be a metabolic catastrophe.

The living tissue becomes further inflamed and the tissue damage quickly involves the adjacent liver. Toxins released from this orgy of tissue destruction are released into the circulation and can cause a body-wide inflammatory response. If the pancreas is affected so as to disrupt its ability to produce insulin, diabetes mellitus can result; this can be either temporary or permanent. The classical signs of pancreatitis are appetite loss, vomiting, diarrhea, painful abdomen, and fever.

The passage of food through the duodenum is a strong stimulus to the pancreas. In the treatment of canine pancreatitis we do not want any stimulation of the pancreas; we want the pancreas to rest. This means a stay in hospital no food or water for 2 to 3 days (IV fluid support prevents dehydration).

Pancreatitis is a painful condition and pain management is not only humane but important in recovery. Untreated pain affects the immune system and increases mortality. Injectable pain medications and continuous drips can be used effectively to control pain. Additional medication to control nausea is also commonly used. Antibiotics are occasionally given because even though pancreatitis is not a bacterial disease, invasion from the diseased intestine is a common occurrence.

Once the patient has started to eat again, a low fat diet, such as one of the prescription diets, is important to minimize pancreatic stimulation. Since there is potential for the pancreas to always have a chronic smoldering bit of inflammation, long-term use of a low fat diet is likely to be recommended.

Kind Regards,  
Scott and Chris