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COLITIS

Your pet has been diagnosed as having Colitis. Colitis is an inflammation of the large bowel (colon). This inflammation may be acute (sudden onset of brief duration) or chronic (long-term), disrupting your pet's normal bowel habits.

Acute colitis occurs most commonly in dogs and frequently responds to one to three weeks of therapy. Chronic colitis can go on for several years or perhaps a lifetime.

SIGNS OF COLITIS

Some dogs and cats may have minor clinical signs; others have severe and sometimes disabling or fatal signs. Dietary therapy and certain medications can help control the inflammation and most signs, but they generally do not provide a cure.

The inflammation in chronic colitis leads to excess water in your pet's stool. This is manifested as diarrhea; you most likely will see frequent passage of small quantities of mucus and/or blood-streaked stools. The diarrhea may be intermittent or continuous.

Abdominal pain, depression, fever, weight loss, and a dull coat may also be present.

CAUSES OF COLITIS

Many things can cause colitis, as can be seen from the chart below. In many cases, the exact cause of colitis may never be determined.

ACUTE	CHRONIC
Whipworms	Whipworms
Spastic colitis	Eosinophilic colitis
Bacterial colitis	Ulcerative colitis
Fungal colitis	Histoplasma
Food-induced	Prototheca
	Polyps
	Tumors
	Allergies (including food allergies)
	Foreign body
	Spastic colitis
	Histocytic ulcerative colitis
	Plasmacytic lymphocytic colitis
	Immunoproliferation enteritis

DIAGNOSIS OF COLITIS

If it is suspected that your pet has colitis some, most or all of these diagnostic tests may be performed: abdominal palpation; rectal exam; white and red blood cell counts; blood chemistry profile; urinalysis; multiple fecal examinations; bacteriologic cultures of feces; x-rays of the digestive tract (possibly with barium); colonoscopy (examination of the colon through a small lighted tube inserted through the anus); biopsy of the colon; and exploratory surgery of abdomen.

MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC COLITIS

Remember few cases of colitis can be cured. The goal of therapy for chronic colitis, therefore, is to enable your pet to maintain as normal a lifestyle as possible. Diet and drugs can generally suppress the inflammation in your pet's colon and help prevent recurrences.

DIET

Many cases of chronic colitis respond to one of two dietary approaches: increasing the amount of fiber in the animal's diet or feeding a diet that is not likely to stimulate an allergic reaction (hypoallergenic diet). There is no way to predict which approach might be better for your pet.

A trial with a therapeutic diet usually takes three to six weeks before we will be able to accurately assess the results of the trial. Be patient, and remember, diarrheas in some pets may actually worsen for a few days while the pets's digestive tract is becoming accustomed to the new diet. *Feed no other foods or treats.*

IMPORTANCE OF FIBER

Fiber is a carbohydrate in our diet that cannot be digested by enzymes. There are two kinds of fiber: one is soluble in water, the other is not. Insoluble fibers provide bulk to the diet and help food and water move through the digestive tract.

It is well established that fiber-rich diets can be used to manage constipation in pets because fiber increases water retention in the intestines, which softens the stool. The increased bulk also increases the propulsive movements of the intestine, helping to alleviate the constipation.

Amazingly enough, fiber can also be used to treat some diarrheas. In diarrhetic animals fiber normalizes intestinal transit time, which increases water absorption from the colon. Therefore, there is less water lost in the stool. That's why high-fiber diets have a place in the treatment of colitis.