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GASTROENTERITIS

Signs

Gastritis is inflammation of the stomach; enteritis is inflammation of the intestinal tract. Consequently, gastroenteritis are vomiting and diarrhea. Vomiting is normally preceded by a period of nausea, with licking, salivation or repeated attempts at swallowing. This period is followed by retching and forceful vomiting. Other clinical signs include belching, increased thirst and increased water consumption. These clinical signs may be followed by a craving for articles of food such as dirt, houseplants or grass. Later in this syndrome, the vomited material and diarrhea may contain blood resulting from increased irritation in the GI system. The fluid loss associated with the vomiting and diarrhea may result in dehydration. Your pet may also exhibit extreme abdominal tenderness.

Causes

Gastroenteritis has been associated with many factors, but frequently associated with ingestion of rancid or spoiled food. These spoiled leftovers or garbage often contain bacteria and occasionally mold which can contribute to the digestive upset.

Eating non-food substances, such as food wrappers, bones, plastic, rocks, and small toys, damages the stomach lining. The incidence of swallowing these types of things is greater in young animals, possibly because of their chewing habits and curious natures. In some long haired cats and dogs, hair accumulates and frequently causes problems in the stomach. Certain drugs, such as aspirin, or chemicals such as cleaning agents and herbicides, are reported to cause gastroenteritis in the dog and cat.

Other causes of gastroenteritis include the ingestion of certain plants and plant toxins. Infectious agents such as bacteria or viruses are commonly associated with gastroenteritis, and internal parasites, such as hookworms, can be a contributing factor. Disease, ulcers, cancer, inflammation, or even stress, may cause the development of gastroenteritis. Another cause can be sensitivities produced by food allergies.

Foods reported to cause allergies in dogs and cats include dairy products, beef, fish, mutton, pork, chicken, wheat, soy, and many others. Usually the pet has been consuming the food for years before a food allergy develops.

Diagnosis

The causes of gastroenteritis are often difficult to diagnose, and in some cases may never be determined. A diagnosis of gastroenteritis is made on the basis of a pet's health history, clinical signs and physical examination findings. Because the causes of

gastroenteritis are so variable, additional tests may also be required. These tests can include the examination of vomit for foreign materials, or special abdominal x-rays using a contrast dye to show gastrointestinal abnormalities. A blood sample may help reveal dehydration of other diseases, and a stool examination may determine the presence of internal parasites. In some cases, an endoscopy or exploratory surgery may be necessary. If a food allergy is suspected you may be asked to keep your pet on a highly restricted diet for several weeks.

To evaluate how well your pet is responding to therapy, some tests may be repeated periodically. Therefore, bring your pet in for reexamination as directed.

Treatment

Dietary restriction is the initial therapy for acute gastroenteritis. Your pet may not be allowed to eat or drink for several days. During this time, intravenous fluid may be necessary to help correct any deficiencies. Medication may also be administered which will help suppress vomiting and slow the movement of ingested materials through the GI system. After food restriction, solid food is reintroduced gradually over a two or three day period. Start with several small meals, several times daily until your pet tolerates its previous feeding regimen.

Depending on the cause of the gastroenteritis, antibiotics may be necessary. Initially, antibiotics will be given by injection but may be followed up with administration of medication by mouth at home.

In cases where non-food matter has been eaten, surgery may be necessary. Following surgery, solid food is reintroduced in the form of a bland diet specifically designed for gastrointestinal disease. These formulas are designed to be extremely digestible to help avoid further irritation to the already sensitive GI tract. If internal parasites have been detected, medication will be necessary to correct this problem.

If your pet is suffering from gastroenteritis due to a food allergy, a hypoallergenic diet may be recommended. These diets are formulated to reduce the likelihood of your pet eating an offending food or to help diagnose the type of food allergy present. Remember, treats and table snacks may also cause food allergies. If food allergy is diagnosed, your pet will probably need to remain on a carefully controlled diet for an indefinite period of time.