

## **Acute colitis**

Colitis is an inflammation of the colon. Acute colitis typically develops rapidly, with clinical signs that appear and disappear within a very short period. The most common causes of acute colitis in dogs and cats are dietary indiscretion (eating something that does not agree with them) and bacterial infection (possibly from spoiled food). Some parasites of the gastrointestinal tract and certain drugs (such as aspirin) also cause colitis. Stress, such as being put into a kennel or hospital, can sometimes lead to acute colitis in a dog or cat.

Because the colon is the last part of the intestinal tract before the rectum and anus, the major clinical sign is diarrhea. Increased urgency to defecate is common; the animal may be anxious, ask to go outside frequently, or have accidents in the house. When the animal attempts to pass a bowel movement a period of unproductive straining may occur, which can be confused with constipation. When a bowel movement is passed, it is usually very soft to watery and small in volume. Occasionally fresh, red blood and mucus (a slimy material) are seen in the stool. Some animals with acute colitis develop a mild fever or lose their appetite. If there is excessive loss of body fluids from diarrhea, signs of dehydration (sunken eyes, lethargy, skin that does not slide easily) can be seen.

A fecal sample is usually tested for parasites. If your pet has a fever or signs of dehydration, blood tests to assess the degree of dehydration and its effects on other organs, such as the kidneys and liver, are often recommended. If your pet has a high fever or has possibly been exposed to raw poultry meat or dead birds, culture of the feces for salmonella bacteria may be recommended. X-rays, an ultrasound of the abdomen, or both are sometimes needed to look for other problems (such as constipation) that can cause similar clinical signs. There is no specific laboratory test for colitis; instead, the diagnosis is usually made from the clinical signs and history. Although the disease can be confirmed with colonoscopy and biopsy, they are rarely done, because the colitis usually resolves quickly.

Most cases of acute colitis are self-limited, meaning that the signs usually resolve without the need for specific therapy. As the cause of the problem resolves or is passed from the gastrointestinal tract, the clinical signs disappear. Antibiotics are not usually helpful and may make matters worse, because they interfere with the normal bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract. Maintenance of adequate fluid intake and feeding of a relatively bland, easily digested diet are usually sufficient, and clinical signs often subside within 2-4 days. If fecal analysis shows evidence of a parasite infestation, then routine, broad-spectrum anti-parasite medications will be prescribed. If a patient is showing evidence of severe dehydration, either on physical examination or on results of blood tests, hospitalization for intravenous fluid therapy may be necessary. Patients with a high fever may be treated with antibiotic drugs. If a salmonella bacterial infection is detected, people must be very careful to wash their hand after handling the animal, because salmonella can infect people as well as animals.

In most cases, the clinical signs resolve rapidly, and there is no need for follow-up visits. If clinical signs do not resolve within 2-3 days, notify your veterinarian. If salmonella infection has been detected and treated with antibiotics, follow-up fecal cultures are needed to be certain that the infection has been eliminated. To prevent a recurrence, avoid feeding the animal any suspect foods, and keep the animal away from substances or situations that caused the colitis.

The prognosis for recovery in most cases of acute colitis is good. Most animals recover with only maintenance of adequate fluid intake and a bland, easily digested diet. Clinical signs should resolve within 2-3 days.