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COLITIS

(Inflammation of the colon)

WHAT IS THE COLON?

The colon is another term for the large or lower intestine. The colon has three functions: absorption of water, storage of feces, and further digestion of unabsorbed nutrients. The bacterial population in the colon is about 10 times denser than that of the small intestines.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COLITIS?

Diarrhea is the main symptom of colitis. In classifying diarrhea, it is important to determine whether the problem relates to the small or the large intestine. Diarrhea due to large intestinal problems has the following common characteristics:

- Increased frequency
- Straining and sense of urgency
- Fresh blood in the stool
- Mucus in the stool

DIAGNOSIS

A diagnosis of colitis is generally straight forward given the above classic findings. The doctor will also want to know: Is the problem acute (suddenly happened), chronic (been happening for several weeks/months regularly) or episodic (seems to come and go)?

ACUTE COLITIS

A pet that has symptoms of colitis suddenly, probably has colitis due to stress (common after boarding, moving, severe weather, etc.), or dietary indiscretion. These cases are generally minor and can be cleared with a short course of medications and/or dietary therapy.

CHRONIC OR INTERMITTANT COLITIS

If your pet has had symptoms of colitis for one month or more or if the signs keep recurring, then more tests should be done to find a definitive cause. Blood work and a fecal analysis are good initial tests. Cats should also have feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus tests done. Further testing can include fecal cultures and colonoscopy and biopsy.

TREATMENT

Colitis is best managed when its cause is known and specific therapy can be instituted. When this is not possible, symptomatic management is often attempted. The following are medications and strategies that can be helpful in the treatment of colitis:

- **Metronidazole:** This medication has anti-inflammatory properties in the large intestine as well as the ability to kill harmful organisms such as Clostridia and Giardia.
- **Sulfasalazine:** This medication consists of a sulfa antibiotic bound to an anti-inflammatory drug. It should not be used in cats.

- **Dietary Fiber:** Colitis is felt to be a fiber responsive disease. Fibers are broken down into nutrients for colon cells and for beneficial colonic bacteria. Examples include canned pumpkin, green beans, and oatmeal.
- **Probiotics:** These supplements have beneficial effects on the intestinal microflora and the patient's overall immune function. They also lead to a stabilization of the GI tract bacteria and can prevent diarrhea. Examples include: plain non-fat yogurt, Purina Fortiflora, FOS, GI Fast Balance, Thorne's Gastriplex.
- **Elimination Diet:** Colitis can result from a food intolerance. Intolerances can result from dyes, preservatives, contaminants, or even natural proteins in the food. Similarly, colitis can result from an actual food allergy. The solution is feeding a "pure" diet, ideally a home cooked diet made with carbohydrates and proteins that are novel or new to the patient. An 8-10 week diet course is typically needed and no other chews or treats can be offered during the time of the trial. Response to an elimination diet is the best test for food allergy or intolerance. Examples include: IVD/Royal Canin (canine-duck/potato, rabbit/potato, venison/potato, whitefish/potato; feline-rabbit/green pea, venison/green pea, lamb/green pea, duck/green pea) Royal Canin Hypoallergenic HP or Sensitivity diet, Hill's Z/D, Z/D Ultra, D/D (rice and egg, potato and duck, potato and venison, potato and salmon), Purina's HA
- **Prednisone:** Prednisone is the cornerstone of treatment when inflammatory bowel disease has been diagnosed by biopsy.