



Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a group of chronic gastrointestinal (GI - stomach and intestines) disorders caused by an infiltration of inflammatory cells into the walls of a pet's GI tract. The cells thicken the wall and disrupt the intestine's ability to function properly.



intestine.

Pets of any age can be affected by IBD; however, the disease occurs most often in middle-aged and older pets. IBD can affect any or all parts of the GI tract – the stomach, small intestine, and/or large

Chronic inflammation can occur from parasites, a bacterial infection, or food allergies. In most cases, however, the specific cause is unknown. Recent research indicates it may be due to a breakdown in the relationship of the normal bacteria in the GI tract and the immune system.

Signs

Common signs of IBD include vomiting, weight loss, diarrhea, and lethargy. Appetite can be variable, ranging from ravenous to anorexic. Some pets will appear to be sick all the time, while others show signs intermittently. The signs can also vary depending on what part of the GI tract is affected.

Diagnosis

Diagnosing IBD can be difficult because the signs of vomiting and diarrhea are common with many conditions.

Initial tests will include fecal tests, blood tests, and x-rays or ultrasound. A food trial to test for food allergies may be done. Biopsies of the GI tract to look for the inflammatory cells are the only way to diagnose IBD definitively.

Treatment

In mild cases, herbs may help to reduce the inflammation. Probiotics will help to keep the GI tract healthy so it can function normally.

A change in diet will often help and you may need to find the one that works best for your pet. Some pets will do well on an allergy diet, while others will do better with a diet high in fiber and low in fat.



Steroids are often given to reduce the inflammation and to suppress the immune system. Antibiotics will control infections that may be a factor. If these measures don't help your pet improve enough, stronger immune suppressing drugs are used.

These medications can have serious side effects, though. Any pet taking immunosuppressive drugs (including steroids) will need to have blood tests on a regular basis to check for side effects.

Summary

IBD may wax and wane even with proper treatment. Finding the right combination of diet and drugs is the key to helping pets. In cats, chronic problems may lead to the development of lymphoma (cancer). In both dogs and cats, the signs of intestinal lymphoma are similar to those of IBD. This means biopsies are critical for a proper diagnosis and correct treatment.