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Colitis

What is colitis?

Colitis is inflammation of the colon. The colon is the last part of the intestines (the large bowel). The colon is important for absorbing water from the faeces, storing the faeces until it is time for them to be passed, and for allowing bacterial digestion of fibre in the diet.

What are the symptoms of colitis?

Dogs with colitis have a specific type of loose stool with some or all of the following characteristics:

- The dog remains quite well, usually with a normal appetite but occasionally vomiting and/or reduced appetite can occur
- There is no weight loss
- There is often fresh blood streaks or flecks in the stool
- There is often slime or mucus in the stool
- The stool often starts normal and finishes loose
- The diarrhoea is more gooey/slimy than watery

We classify colitis as being acute, chronic or episodic. When we use the term “acute colitis” we mean that the problem occurs suddenly. When we use the term “chronic colitis” we mean that



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the problem has been happening regularly for several weeks. When we use the term “episodic colitis” we mean that the problem happens, then goes away, and then happens again.

Acute colitis

Most dogs that suddenly develop symptoms of colitis probably have a stress related colitis (often triggered by moving house, boarding kennels, new pets, severe weather, building work, etc) or a diet related colitis (related to eating treats or titbits, or scavenging rubbish). We will recommend a bland diet such as chicken, rice or white fish whilst your dog is recovering from colitis. A probiotic paste can be used to help speed up recovery and help solidify the faeces reducing the amount of diarrhoea. In some cases we will prescribe an antibiotic which is particularly effective for the bacteria in the large intestine. The most commonly used antibiotic is metronidazole, which also has anti-inflammatory properties in the colon.

It is also sensible to worm your dog if he has not been wormed within the previous month.

Chronic or episodic colitis (symptoms persist or frequently recur)

If your dog has had colitis symptoms for over one month, further investigation is needed to search for the actual cause of the colitis. Your veterinary surgeon may suggest some of the following investigations – blood tests to look at organ function, red and white blood cells, mineral and electrolyte levels; blood tests to check that the pancreas is producing the correct digestive



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enzymes; culture and microscope examination of the faeces; colonoscopy with biopsies of the colon under general anaesthetic.

If the above investigations find a specific cause for the colitis, treatment can be tailored to suit your dog's particular situation. If further investigation is not possible, symptomatic management is often attempted. The following medications and management techniques are often used to treat chronic or episodic colitis:

Metronidazole

This medication has anti-inflammatory properties in the large intestine. It also kills harmful bacteria (such as Clostridia) and parasites (such as Giardia) which can cause or exacerbate colitis. The medication is usually used as a short course, but may be helpful on a long term basis in difficult cases.

Other antibiotics

A number of other antibiotics, including ampicillin, clindamycin, amoxicillin have activity against the bacteria commonly found in the colon.

Sulphasalazine

This medication is an anti-inflammatory which acts mainly on the colon. It can be used in short courses whenever the colitis flares up. It is often very effective, however in some dogs it can interfere with tear production and cause a problem known as "dry eye". Regular measurement of tear production is recommended in dogs using this medication regularly.



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Prednisolone

Prednisolone is a steroid tablet that is used for certain types of colitis that are caused by inflammatory bowel disease.

Inflammatory bowel disease can only be diagnosed by biopsy.

Diet

Diet plays an important role in the management of colitis. There are three main categories of diet that may help. We find that individual dogs differ as to which of these diet types helps their colitis. Therefore we recommend that you start off with one of the diets for a period of 4-6 weeks and if no positive response is observed, then try a diet from another category. Whenever you trial any special diet it is extremely important that the dog receives this diet only and no other titbits, dog food, milk, chews etc. This ensures that you are giving the special diet a fair trial! The three categories of diet are:

1. High dietary fibre

These diets increase the amount of fibre that reaches the colon. Fibre helps to bulk up the stool and encourages the growth of useful bacteria that correct the balance of the colon. They also tend to be low in fat. Prescription diets such as Hills Canine w/d or r/d (tins or dry food), or Royal Canin High Fibre Diet (dry food) are available.

2. Highly digestible diets



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These diets are low fat diets designed to produce a smaller faecal mass. Prescription diets available include Hills Canine i/d (tins or dry food), Eukanuba Low Residue Canine (dry), Royal Canin Low Fat Diet (tins or dry food).

3. Hypoallergenic diet

These diets will help those cases of colitis that are triggered by a food sensitivity. Hypoallergenic diets are available commercially, for example James Wellbeloved, Waffcol Salmon and Potato, Burns. We also have prescription hypoallergenic diets such as Hills Canine d/d and Royal Canin Sensitivity diet.

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