The ABCs of feline pancreatitis

Q: What does the pancreas do?
A: The pancreas has two primary functions:
   • **Endocrine**—produces insulin to control metabolism and blood sugar levels
   • **Exocrine (digestion)**—produces and secretes digestive enzymes critical for normal food digestion

Q: What is pancreatitis?
A: Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. Digestive enzymes that are normally inactive until they reach the small intestine are activated within the pancreas. The result is inflammation and often autodigestion (the organ begins to digest itself).

There are two types of pancreatitis:
- **Acute pancreatitis** occurs abruptly.
  - Acute necrotizing (cell death) pancreatitis is a life-threatening condition.
  - This condition is often reversible after treatment.
  - In other cases, it may lead to chronic pancreatitis.
- **Chronic pancreatitis** is a continuing inflammatory disease often accompanied by irreversible changes to the pancreas.
  - Flare-ups may occur, resulting in acute pancreatitis.
  - Pancreatitis is often manageable with close monitoring and dietary discretion.

Q: What should I look for?
A: Pancreatitis presents differently in cats than in dogs. Cats often present with vague clinical signs, such as lethargy, decreased appetite and dehydration. These signs may indicate problems with the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Compared to dogs, the signs for cats less frequently include vomiting and abdominal pain.

Q: What can I do about it?
A: Treating feline pancreatitis is primarily supportive. Key therapies include:
   • Fluid therapy
   • Pain management
   • Nutritional support
   • Antiemetic support, if vomiting is present

Note: Identification and management of concurrent diseases is critical to a successful outcome.
Answers to pet owners’ most commonly asked questions

Q: What is pancreatitis?
A: Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. This happens when digestive enzymes are abnormally activated within the pancreas. These enzymes can also leak from the pancreas into the bloodstream. The result is pain and swelling and often autodigestion (the organ begins to digest itself).

Q: Why does my cat need to be tested?
A: A SNAP® fPL™ Test is included in the initial workup for any cat that presents with nonspecific gastrointestinal (GI) signs. The SNAP fPL Test measures pancreas-specific lipase, a digestive enzyme.

Q: What does it mean if the result on my cat’s test is abnormal?
A: An abnormal result tells your veterinarian that the pancreas-specific lipase levels in your cat’s blood are higher than normal.

Q: Why is it important to check the pancreas?
A: Increased pancreas-specific lipase levels can indicate pancreatitis. If not treated, this can lead to additional health problems for your pet. Knowing possible underlying causes of your cat’s symptoms helps your veterinarian design the best treatment and monitoring plan.

Q: What will happen next?
A: Your veterinarian will provide treatment and follow-up recommendations. During treatment, your veterinarian may occasionally monitor your cat’s pancreas-specific lipase levels to help determine treatment success.

Some of the treatment options will include:

• Keep your cat hydrated. If necessary, your veterinarian may provide fluids through an IV at the clinic.

• Manage your cat’s pain. Cats may not always show pain even if they’re experiencing it. Experts agree that pain management should be provided for all cats with pancreatitis.

• Get (or keep) your cat eating. Your veterinarian will have recommendations for the best way to provide nutritional support for your cat.

If you have more questions about pancreatitis or your cat, talk with your veterinarian.