

Colitis

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, this is Dr. Becker, and today we're going to discuss colitis. Colitis means inflammation of the colon, also called the large bowel or large intestine. It's the last functional part of the GI tract responsible for final stages of digestion. Colitis occurs when the lining of the colon becomes irritated and inflamed, disrupting the last part of the digestive process. It is the result of pro-inflammatory cytokines cascade, which means there's an accumulation of inflammatory markers in the colon that disrupt normal cellular structure at the junctions of colonic tissues.

This inflammation triggers secretions of mucus and other substances from the lining of the colon that interferes with normal gut motility. Inflammation of the colon triggers the cascade of gastrointestinal events on a cellular level that reduces the colon's ability to absorb water from dietary waste products. This causes the stool to become loose and watery.

Ultimately, the colon's ability to absorb water, and store and transport feces is ultimately compromised, resulting in diarrhea that is oftentimes tinged with mucus or fresh blood. Pets with colitis can't tell us how they're feeling. But based on how humans with colitis feel, we can assume that a dog or cat with this condition is dealing with a substantial amount of discomfort and pain.

Causes

Colitis is often caused by one of the disorders of inflammatory bowel disease, which includes lymphocytic-plasmacytic enterocolitis, eosinophilic enterocolitis, granulomatous enteritis, neutrophilic enterocolitis, and histiocytic ulcerative colitis.

Infectious causes of colitis are also common and can include pathogenic salmonella infections, campylobacter, giardia, E.coli, hystoplasma, and/or clostridium infections as well as internal parasites. C

Colitis can also be the result of an injury caused by a foreign body, by physical trauma, or by ingesting abrasive items. Sometimes dogs eat things that they shouldn't and really can cause a lot of inflammation along the whole GI tract.

Allergic conditions and immunosuppressive disorders can also can colitis as can stress-related irritable bowel disease or IBS, as well as dietary indiscretion. Other causes include antibiotics that upset the normal flora of the bowel, food sensitivities or intolerances, environmental stress, ingestion of toxins or foreign bodies, and bacterial overgrowth. Two much less common causes include fungal infections and toxic blue-green algae-related diseases, which are called prototheca colitis.

Some boxers are predisposed to histiocytic ulcerative colitis, which is associated with IBD. German shepherd dogs and pure-bred cats have a higher incidence of lymphocytic-plasmacytic enterocolitis and associated IBD. Irritable bowel syndrome, which is a common cause of colitis in dogs is frequently seen in nervous or high-strung pets.

Pets that eat indiscriminately as well as free-roaming animals are also at a higher risk for colitis. I see a substantial amount of colitis in pets on diets that don't resonate with their physiology, even prescription I/D diets or intestinal diets that are designed for this.

Acute, Episodic, and Chronic Colitis

Acute colitis is often seen in young cats with intestinal parasites or intestinal bacterial overgrowth. Chronic colitis is actually more seen in middle age and older cats and dogs, and is often caused by other issues. Kitties can be prone to IBD that morphs into GI cancer, and dogs can be prone to chronic colitis.

Colitis can be acute, episodic, or chronic.

Acute colitis can be common in dogs and tends to resolve on its own within a few days, which is why the underlying cause oftentimes just goes undiagnosed. We don't know why they had it, but it was here. They had diarrhea, it got better.

The symptoms appear very suddenly and other than the diarrhea, the dog tends to be pretty normal. They're not really sick per se, they just have diarrhea. Sometimes a dog or cat will be fine one minute and be intensely painful the next.

Acute colitis is often caused by stress, ingestion of toxins or foreign bodies, a dietary food change or food intolerance, internal parasites, drug administration, or bacterial overgrowth.

Episodic colitis is sporadic. The symptoms can be very mild to severe. These episodes can last for a few weeks. Chronic colitis, on the other hand, can last for a few months and actually up to years. Usually the patients get aggressively worse overtime.

Common symptoms of colitis – all forms of colitis – are watery diarrhea (which may include fresh red blood and mucus), increased urgency in a dog to go outside or a kitty to get to the litter box soft stools, slimy or greasy poo, and painful cramping upon defecation. Sometimes animals will strain to go poo. They can have gas, and there could be a lot of secondary inflammation or redness around the anus. Oftentimes there's nausea and vomiting noted as well.

In chronic colitis, there can also be dehydration. That can in turn lead to a lack of appetite, which can lead to weight loss. Sometimes dogs and cats just don't feel well, so they avoid people. They're sleeping a lot. They're reserved. They're lethargic. They can have a poor hair coat. They can have poor body condition, because they're not absorbing or processing nutrients well.

If the small intestine is also inflamed, there can be black tarry stools instead of or along with bright red blood in the stool as well.

Diagnosis

Your veterinarian will perform a physical exam (including abdominal palpation, feeling the abdomen), bloodwork (including a complete blood count (CBC) and serum biochemistry), as well as urinalysis. Obviously, stool samples will be checked. They'll be checked for parasites as well. But in addition to

parasite checks, they will be sent out for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for the presence of campylobacter, clostridium, giardia, salmonella, corona, and parvo virus, and tritrichomonas panleucopenia for kitties.

Abdominal X-rays may reveal masses or tumors, if something's going on inside the GI tract. There could be fecal impactions. X-rays can also identify thick and large intestine tissue or some other abnormalities that could be seen using that diagnostic technique.

If symptomatic treatment doesn't fix the problem, the most useful procedure for identifying the underlying cause of colitis is a colonoscopy, which is where a camera's passed up your dog or cat's rectum, and tissue samples are taken from where there could be abnormal-looking tissue. The camera at the end of the scope allows the veterinary to find where the issue is and then samples those areas.

Treatment

Treatment of colitis requires identifying and resolving the underlying reason of why it's occurring. To deal with symptoms of colitis in an otherwise healthy pet a very common approach that you probably have heard about is to fast your pet for 24 hours. As long as you have healthy vibrant pet that just has sudden diarrhea, fasting for 24 hours is great. You never withhold water, just food. Then you slowly reintroduce some bland diet.

I recommend canned pumpkin and cooked turkey, not the traditional rice and ground beef that sometimes old-time veterinarians used to recommend. There's less carbohydrate, less sugar for abnormal flora to try and use as a food source. It's a more bland species-appropriate diet. The bland diet should be followed by a low-residue novel protein diet, especially if you are suspecting that food allergies or hypersensitivities could be a problem.

The best way to determine what not to feed your pet if you do suspect that food could be the culprit of the intermittent loose stool in your dog is Dr. Dodd's NutriScan test, which is a saliva test that very accurately determines which ingredients your pet could be sensitive to.

There are a number of homeopathics, herbs, nutraceuticals, lots of different things, including a multitude of different probiotic strains that I use regularly that are really excellent in helping to reduce GI inflammation.

Certain procedures, such as fecal transplants can also be incredibly beneficial. Now, whether these supplements or procedures are introduced before dietary change, during a dietary change, or after a dietary change, really depends on your pet's specific issues.

Changing too many things at once can actually make your pet's symptoms worse. Oftentimes professional guidance is really needed to walk you through this, especially if you have a pet that is incredibly sensitive and no matter what you do, it tends to make the diarrhea worse.

In these situations where you have a really (I call them butterflies) very sensitive dog or cat. No matter what you do, your pet tends to not react well. You need to start thinking about the potential of your pet dealing with leaky gut syndrome, also called dysbiosis.

Most chronic dysbiosis patients need professional help. That's not only having a veterinarian or healthcare professional that has really good veteran experience in picking what resonates with certain breeds, age, sex, stressful situations. It's just not a cookie cutter approach.

But for identifying and remedying the root cause of why the dysbiosis is occurring in the first place, integrative veterinarians have numerous protocols for colitis and leaky gut patients that conventional veterinarians simply don't know about. We didn't learn about this in vet school.

Because the protocols are based on the type of colitis your pet has, it's impossible for me to cover the myriad of treatment options available in this video. But please just know that if you have a pet that has had GI symptoms and you're really concerned about them.

If your pet didn't resolve with a traditional treatment – maybe Flagyl (metronidazole) or Lomotil – that your local vet gave, or maybe your local vet said, "Here's a prescription diet that should fix it," but it didn't, don't despair. There are lots and lots of other options that you probably haven't tried that are incredibly successful.

Other environmental and lifestyle factors you should address with your integrative veterinarian are future vaccines, which I don't recommend for these patients. Really I don't recommend any vaccines that are unnecessary. How you discern that is with the blood test called a titer. Also future use of other drugs, including heartworm, flea, and tick medications should also be evaluated, because all of those additional drugs going into the body could be a contributing unaddressed source of inflammation.