

## Inflammatory Bowel Disease

### What is inflammatory bowel disease?

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a chronic disease of the intestinal tract which can affect the stomach, small intestine or large intestine . Most affected dogs have a history of recurrent vomiting and/or diarrhoea and sometimes blood can be present in the stools. During periods of vomiting or diarrhoea, the dog may lose weight but is generally normal in other ways. As a rule, most affected dogs eat well (or even have an increased appetite) although some individuals will suffer from abdominal discomfort and become lethargic.

### What causes this disease?

The cause of IBD is poorly understood. In fact, it appears that there may be several causes. Whatever the cause(s), the end result is that the lining of the intestine is invaded by inflammatory cells. An allergic-type response is then set in place within the bowel lining, causing it to become intolerant of the normal gut contents. This interferes with the ability of the dog to digest and absorb nutrients.

There are thought to be three main predisposing factors:

- Diet
- Parasites
- Bacteria

However, in a proportion of cases an underlying cause cannot be identified.

### How is IBD diagnosed?

IBD is a diagnosis of exclusion which means that it is really only confirmed once other possible causes have been ruled out. Although it can take a number of weeks to establish - which can be frustrating to both the owner and the vet - it is important that the approach to diagnosis is thorough and methodical. This means that each step in the process gives valuable information, narrowing down what does or doesn't help in controlling the symptoms. It is widely accepted that for this condition, response to treatment can be an effective means of diagnosis. The diagnostic steps are likely to involve the following:

Blood tests - these are taken to exclude other diseases and can include a test to establish if the pancreas is working normally, i.e. if digestion is normal and whether the digested food is being absorbed correctly.

Dietary modification - special diets including hypo-allergenic foods, low residue diets or high fibre foods may be trialled to see if there is a reduction in the symptoms. Sometimes a specific food may resolve the problem entirely, but even if it doesn't, an appropriate diet can be helpful in

minimising the symptoms.

Drug administration - Anti-parasitic treatment, antibiotics or anti-inflammatory drugs may be prescribed and any improvement gauged.

Biopsy - if the diagnostic steps mentioned above are not helpful, it may be necessary to obtain biopsy samples from the bowel. This can be either via the oral route using a flexible endoscope or in some cases following an exploratory laparotomy where the bowel is examined during operation for signs of disease. With both methods, portions of the diseased tissue are secured for further tests.

### **Is IBD treatable?**

IBD is often treatable but not usually curable. How well the symptoms can be managed varies between individuals and since not all dogs respond to the same medication, a series or combination of drugs may be necessary.

### **What is the prognosis?**

Once the appropriate drugs or diet can be determined, many dogs are maintained on these for life, although dosages of the drugs may eventually be decreased. Occasionally, a dog will be able to stop drug therapy at some point and can be maintained on dietary treatment alone.

Most dogs do well for many years but intermittent 'flare ups' of the symptoms are to be expected. Other dogs require alterations in therapy every few months and unfortunately, a few dogs will ultimately become totally resistant to treatment.

Some severe forms of canine inflammatory bowel disease can eventually progress to intestinal cancer. This finding is well documented in human beings and, in recent years, sadly it has become apparent that this occurs in dogs as well.