

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE

What is inflammatory bowel disease?

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a chronic disease of the intestinal tract. Occasionally, the stomach may be involved. Most dogs with IBD have a history of recurrent or chronic vomiting and/or diarrhea. During periods of vomiting or diarrhea, the dog may lose weight but is normal otherwise.

What causes this disease?

The cause of IBD is poorly understood. In fact, it appears there are 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 then occurs within the intestinal tract. This inflammation interferes with the ability to digest and absorb nutrients.

For some dogs, diet plays a role in causing IBD. Bacterial proteins may be involved in other cases. In most instances, an underlying cause cannot be identified.

How is IBD diagnosed?

Diagnostic tests for IBD range from fecal evaluations to blood tests to intestinal biopsies. Depending on the results, special diets may then be tried depending on which part of the bowel appears to be involved. These diets include hypoallergenic foods, low residue diets or high fiber diets. In addition, if it appears from the blood tests that bacterial overgrowth is present, several medications may be administered.

Is IBD treatable?

When a diagnosis of IBD is made, the dog is placed on a hypoallergenic, low residue or high fiber diet for eight to twelve weeks. If the dietary trial does not result in improvement, medication may be used to control the problem. Since not all dogs respond to the same medication, a series of drugs may be necessary.

What is the prognosis?

Once the appropriate drugs or diet is determined, many dogs remain on these for life, although dosages of the drugs may eventually be decreased. Occasionally, a dog will be able to stop drug therapy in the future.

Most dogs do well for many years while others require alterations in therapy every few months. Unfortunately, a few dogs will fail to respond to treatment.

Some severe forms of canine inflammatory bowel disease will eventually progress to intestinal cancer. This finding is well documented in human beings and, in recent years, it has also been shown to occur in dogs.

