



## Ettinger: Textbook of Veterinary Internal Medicine, 7th Edition

### Colitis

Albert E. Jergens

#### **What is colitis?**

Colitis refers to the inflammation of the colon (e.g., large intestine) with any of a variety of causes. Colitis is a relatively common problem in pets and may be caused by reactions to food, gastrointestinal parasites, bacterial or fungal infections, benign infiltrative diseases (such as inflammatory bowel disease), and even neoplasia (cancer).

#### **What are the symptoms of colitis?**

The most common symptoms of colitis include:

- Straining to defecate
- Bright red blood on the stool
- Fecal mucus
- Increased frequency of defecation

Most animals are alert, active, and have normal appetites in spite of having colitis. Occasionally, they have diseases affecting both the small intestine and colon, which may cause vomiting, alterations in appetite, and/or weight loss.

#### **What tests are needed?**

Diagnosis of colitis is based on the pet's history and findings of the physical examination by your veterinarian, as well as selected diagnostic tests. Puppies and kittens are particularly prone to acute colitis caused by dietary indiscretion (eating garbage), parasites, and bacterial infections, which may be spread from animal to animal. Most of these disorders cause abrupt symptoms prompting veterinary attention.

Parasites are easily diagnosed by your veterinarian, who can do so by examining fresh feces under a microscope. Rectal swabs for cytologic examination or bacterial fecal cultures may also be recommended.

Other diseases, such as fungal infections (e.g., Histoplasmosis), inflammatory bowel disease, and neoplasia, occur mostly in adult animals and are characterized by symptoms that have been present for several weeks to months. These animals usually require hospitalization and a more in-depth diagnostic evaluation to confirm a diagnosis. Careful rectal examination is performed in all animals and may provide important clues to the cause of inflammation.

Animals that fail to respond to symptomatic therapy (see below) and those having chronic symptoms require additional diagnostic testing.

These tests may include:

- Blood work
- Urinalysis
- Radiographic imaging procedures
- Tissue biopsy
- Endoscopic examination

Endoscopic examination of the colon (e.g., colonoscopy; which is an examination of the inside of the colon with an endoscope) with mucosal biopsy provides the most definitive diagnosis in most cases. Your pet may require hospitalization before the procedure for bowel cleansing. The colonoscopy is performed while your pet is anesthetized. The results of endoscopic biopsy will guide treatment recommendations by your veterinarian and provide useful information about the likelihood of cure or recurrence.

### **What treatment can be used?**

There are several possibilities for treatment of colitis, depending on what your veterinarian believes to be the cause:

- Therapeutic trials may be used in animals suspected of having parasitic causes of colitis. Some parasites (such as whipworm infestation in dogs) are difficult to detect. Your veterinarian may treat your dog with medication to kill this or other suspected parasites.
- Therapeutic trials may also be implemented in pets that have dietary causes for colitis. These pets usually respond well to being fed "bland" or hypoallergenic diets. These nutritionally complete diets are highly digestible and reduce the workload of the gut.
- Fiber supplementation is also beneficial in promoting healing and repair of colonic tissue. A variety of prescription diets or homemade recipes that are appropriate for your pet may be obtained from your veterinarian.
- Bacterial colitis is best treated with an antibiotic based on fecal culture results.

Regardless of the cause, dietary modification with a hypoallergenic diet and fiber supplementation are beneficial for most dogs and cats with chronic colitis.