Colitis in Dogs

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Colitis describes an inflammation of the colon. The cause may be bacteria, stress, parasites, etc. However, there is usually no detectable reason for the inflammation.

What are the symptoms?

Most dogs with colitis look and feel normal. They simply have frequent mucous and occasional flecks of blood in their feces. In severe cases, vomiting may occur. Some dogs and cats will experience severe pain when defecating because of inflammation of the colon, and may actually try and stop the defecation process, thereby, resulting in constipation. There may be constipation or diarrhea, but invariably there will be an abnormal defecation process.

Some breeds are prone to developing colitis. Boxers are very susceptible, but it is not known why this is so. Deep ulcers may develop in the colon wall, and the condition is called "Boxer ulcerative colitis."

What are the risks?

Most dogs have no serious health risk. When deep ulceration of the colon develops, the situation is more serious. Some dogs, especially Boxers, develop chronic colitis and need long-term treatment.

What is the management?

A rectal exam coupled with a biopsy of the colon wall will generally confirm a diagnosis. Fecal exams for colon parasites such as *Giardia* should be performed in all cases. Bland diets such as cottage cheese and rice will help the colon rest and heal. Sometimes, the dog must be placed on a bland, easily digestible diet for the rest of his life. Antibiotics will help control bacterial causes. Sulfa-containing drugs can be used long-term to control or treat chronic colitis. Azulfidine (sulfasalazine) is one such drug commonly used to control chronic colitis. In some animals, steroids such as prednisone may be used.

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