

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) in Dogs

A Brief Guide • Part of the Educational Pet Disease Series from Lap of Love

Signs & Symptoms

Initial Symptoms

- Diarrhea, small piles containing mucous, blood or large, watery piles
- Straining to defecate
- Inappropriate defecation
- Fatigues easily
- Bruises easily, poor clotting

Intermediate Symptoms

- Weight loss
- Vomiting, Intermittent
- Weakness, fatigue
- Muscle wasting
- Poor coat, lack of grooming
- Increased gut noises

Advanced Symptoms

- Yellowing of the skin (jaundice)
- Fluid in the abdomen (ascites)
- Edema (fluid retention)
- Abdominal pain
- Black tarry stool
- Vomiting blood

Crisis Situations Requiring Immediate Medical Intervention

- Difficulty breathing
- Uncontrollable panting
- Unable to walk
- Blue gums and/or tongue
- Sudden collapse
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Crying in pain

What Is It?

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) represents several types of gastrointestinal disorders that have no specific etiology (cause), but that produce predictable clinical symptoms and have the microscopic findings of inflammatory cells within the tissue. The most common form of IBD in dogs, called lymphocytic-plasmacytic enteritis, involves two types of immune cells, lymphocytes and plasma cells. Lymphocytic-plasmacytic enteritis affects the gastrointestinal system causing GI inflammation (enteritis). Canine IBD typically presents with diarrhea, intermittent vomiting, weight loss, straining to defecate, bloody stool, painful belly, and a lack of appetite. Other clinical symptoms include lethargy, poor coat/grooming, liver disease, muscle loss, and weakness. Some breeds are known for breed-specific forms of IBD which are thought to have a genetic basis such as Boxer Colitis, commonly called large bowel diarrhea of Boxers. However, the majority of IBD cases have unknown causes and several possible factors influencing the disease such as genetics, GI infections, immune-mediated, psychological, GI defense dysfunction, and food allergies.

Diagnosis

A definitive diagnosis for IBD technically requires persistent repetitive symptoms indicative of the disease paired with a biopsy sample from the gastrointestinal tract. The biopsy sample must be examined microscopically to confirm the presence of IBD and further classify the type of inflammation present. Owners may be unable or unwilling to pursue a biopsy-based diagnosis for their dog. In these situations, the diagnosis is a presumptive one based on the best-educated determination paired with response to treatments. A biopsy can be obtained with exploratory surgery or less invasive endoscopic or/and laparoscopic techniques. Further testing may include specific gastrointestinal panels, fecal testing, abdominal ultrasound, x-rays, basic bloodwork, organ function panels, and others.

Treatment and Management

Broadly, treatment and management aim to decrease the vomiting and diarrhea, promote a healthy appetite, and maintain a healthy weight through proper digestion of as much as possible. General common options include:

1. **Antiparasitics** - Fenbendazole and others are used as the first line of treatment for a number of parasites.
2. **Dietary** - A prescription diet trial with a novel (never eaten) protein such as rabbit and pea over 6-8 weeks with absolutely no treats may help to determine if there is a dietary component. Hypoallergenic diets and homemade diet options are also available to try. Large bowel diarrhea may benefit from a high fiber diet supplement.
3. **Antibiotics** - Tylosin, metronidazole, and enrofloxacin can help treat bacterial-induced diarrhea.
4. **Steroids** - Prednisone, one option, is helpful for immune-mediated IBD and to decrease inflammation in all forms. There are significant side effects however, and this is generally saved as the last option.
5. **Immuno-suppressives and support agents** - Azathioprine or cyclosporine (atopica) may be necessary for the treatment plan for refractory cases. Supportive medications, such as the gall bladder supportive Ursodiol, can help to greatly improve quality of life.
6. **Environmental modification** - changing small things at home, like potty pads inside for small dogs in winter helps.



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Prognosis

Every dog is different with response rate, treatment success, improvement of symptoms, and IBD relapse. Dogs whose IBD is refractory to medications, food changes, and harbor other illnesses have a poor to grave prognosis. Canines that take medication well and respond to at least one or more treatment possibilities have a fair prognosis. Stringent rules in terms of diet (including treats), weight control, and environmental stress by the owners can help the prognosis; a strict diet without treats or table food is imperative for many dogs. Talk with your veterinarian and an internal medicine specialist regarding a personalized treatment plan for your dog.

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Management Tips

Consider providing:

- Easily accessible water
- Consistently portioned meals
- Prescription diet foods
- Wet food to increase water intake
- Several small meals over the day instead of 1 or 2 large meals
- Healthy, low fat, easy to digest treats for others to give safely

Try to:

- Be consistent with medications and food
- Track appetite, urination, drinking, weight, vomiting, diarrhea, energy, etc.
- Limit stress (kids, noise)
- Keep up with preventative care
- Address concerns ASAP
- Low impact activity and supervised play
- Avoid prolonged periods in the heat
- Use pet sitters with medical experience or board at a hospital
- Have a small supply of meds at home
- Go out with your dog to monitor bowel movements
- Keep pet on preventatives that will protect against parasites
- Secure food bins to decrease the chance of mites, mold, and dust
- Monitor pets around children to avoid unwanted food-sharing
- Secure garbage bins to avoid dumpster diving leading to dietary indiscretion

Before your pet's condition becomes unmanageable or they are losing quality of life, it is important to begin end-of-life care discussions. Learn about pet hospice care and/or euthanasia services in your area so you are prepared.