

“Pansteatitis: Yellow Fat Disease in Cats”

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Homemade diets for pets are popular among pet owners. The practice is promoted by pet food delis, Internet recipes and is even medically necessary for some pets. As the number of pets receiving homemade diets increases, the risk for disease related to unbalanced nutrition also increases.

This month, I thought I would write about an unusual disease that we as veterinarians could see in cats receiving all fish diets. If you diagnose this – take pictures – it isn’t common.

Pansteatitis is a type of panniculitis that occurs in cats or other species receiving a fish-only diet. The clinical characteristics include: fever, anorexia, depression, generalized hyperesthesia, pain, subcutaneous nodules and yellow adipose tissue. Differentials include other causes of panniculitis such as: bacterial, fungal, foreign body, lupus-associated or sterile nodular.

Skin biopsy is diagnostic (as long as fat is included in the sample). Treatment is supportive care to correct and prevent dehydration, pain and anorexia. Vitamin E in the form of alpha tocopherol should be administered at a dose of 50mg/kg by mouth once daily for about 2 months. Prednisolone should be administered at a dose of about 2mg/kg by mouth per day, tapering over about 3 weeks. Prognosis is generally good. Marked improvement should be seen within the first one or two weeks.

Vitamin E protects cells against lipid peroxidation (keeps fat from going rancid). Some individuals are more sensitive to vitamin E deficiencies than others. Some cats will eat an all-fish diet their entire lives without problem, and other cats will develop pansteatitis even if small amounts of kibble are supplemented in a fish-predominant diet.

So the moral of the story is: fish oil is good for you, but don’t forget your vitamin E!