So my cat has inflammatory bowel disease

What is inflammatory bowel disease?
Inflammatory bowel disease, known as IBD, is a term that is used to describe a group of intestinal diseases. Cats with IBD classically have evidence of inflammatory cell infiltration (typically white blood cells) into the intestinal walls. As a result of this infiltration the movement, digestion, and absorption of food and liquids becomes abnormal/incomplete. IBD is a long standing problem and typically not a mild, self-resolving irritation of the intestine. The cause of IBD is currently unknown but is likely a result of multiple factors, which may not be the same from cat to cat. Small cell lymphoma of the intestinal tract can appear very similar to IBD.

What are the clinical signs of inflammatory bowel disease?
There are many signs of IBD and the severity of the signs can vary. Common signs include:
- Chronic intermittent vomiting - more often than once a month for several months.
- Diarrhea.
- Weight loss.

How is IBD diagnosed?
The only way to definitively diagnose IBD (and rule out lymphoma) is through intestinal biopsies. There are many tests that can be used to rule out other diseases and increase the suspicion of IBD prior to discussion of intestinal biopsies. Based on your cat’s history and exam a step-wise plan will be started to make sure we get an accurate diagnosis. Some or all of these tests may be recommended for your cat. These tests include:
- Full blood work and urinalysis.
- Fecal and giardia testing.
- Diet trial - either with a GI diet or with a hypoallergenic diet.
- Abdominal radiographs.
- Pancreatic profile to evaluate the pancreas and vitamins absorbed through the intestinal tract.
- Abdominal ultrasound**.
- Intestinal biopsies.
- ** Not performed at the Feline Medical Clinic

What are the treatment options?
Treatment depends on the results of the tests above and the level of diagnostics pursued by each family. There is no cure for IBD but rather management of the clinical signs and most cats require more than one type of treatment to achieve this. Treatment can include but is not limited to:
- Diet change.
- Vit B supplement - either injections or oral flavored chews.
• Steroids (long term)- traditionally a pill but can be made into a liquid. This is the mainstay of treatment for most cats.
• Probiotics.
• Anti-nausea medications.
• ** If intestinal biopsies are completed additional medications can sometimes be used

What if I want to do an abdominal ultrasound and/or intestinal biopsies?
For those owners wishing to pursue more advanced diagnostics we refer to local internal medicine specialist in the area. You will consult with the specialist who will review your cats full medical history and make recommendations for further diagnostics which may include ultrasound and/or intestinal biopsies. This is the best way to get more information.

What sort of monitoring is required?
Monitoring depends on the patient and the severity of the disease present. At minimum yearly blood work is required if the cat is on any long-term medications. Long-term steroids have the risk of inducing diabetes and this can be screened for on the yearly blood work. Ideally we monitor weight more often to make sure weight loss is not occurring.

What if I choose not to treat my cat?
If treatment is not elected the clinical signs will continue and may worsen over time. Weight loss will likely continue ultimately creating a quality of life situation as the disease progresses.

What if I want to learn more?
IBD can be a confusing disease process. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask us! We are happy to discuss this disease and treatment options further! Additionally we have more in depth hand- outs if you would like.

Sources:
• Clinical Veterinary Advisor Dogs and Cats 3rd Edition 2015
• The Feline Patient 4th Edition 2011

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