

Liver Disease/Failure

Liver disease and liver failure are common problems in both dogs and cats. The liver can fail for many different reasons and symptoms can vary. There are different causes of liver failure and the prognosis ranges from good to poor depending on the specific cause and the individual animal.

What Is the Liver's Function in the Dog and Cat?

The liver has many different functions in the canine and feline. It detoxifies the blood, synthesizes proteins and produces many of the chemicals necessary for digestion to occur normally. It also metabolizes carbohydrates and lipids and produces coagulation factors that are necessary for proper clotting of blood. In addition, it acts as one of the major storage systems in the body. These are only a few of its functions.

Needless to say, when the liver fails to function normally, the situation can become quite serious.

What Causes Canine and Feline Liver Disease?

There are many different diseases that can affect the liver and cause it to fail. These causes include:

- viruses, such as the canine adenovirus
- bacteria, such as leptospirosis
- parasites
- toxins or poisons
- metabolic diseases
- neoplasia (cancer)
- age progression

What Are the Signs of Liver Failure in the Dog and Cat?

In the early stages, liver failure may cause a lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss and an increase in thirst and urination. As liver failure progresses, jaundice may become noticeable.

Jaundice refers to a yellow coloration to the skin, gums, tongue, sclera (white part of the eyes) and other mucous membranes.

Accumulation of fluid within the abdominal cavity, a condition called ascites, may make your dog or cat look bloated.

Bleeding and bruising may also occur because the liver is not able to produce adequate levels of coagulation factors to control clotting. Blood may be seen in your dog or cat's urine, vomit or feces. Your pet may also have bruises under his skin or small pin-point areas of hemorrhage on his gums.

Incoordination, episodic weakness, disorientation, head-pressing, behavioral changes, drooling, stupor, and mental dullness are seen sometimes since the liver can no longer metabolize toxins in the blood and these toxins reach the brain.

Treatment:

The treatment of liver disease in dog and cats ranges from specific therapies aimed at sustaining the effects of the liver disease to supportive care of the patient. In cases of toxicity caused failure medications may only be needed while the liver repairs itself over time. Some prescription diets, liver supplements and vitamins may be suggested by your veterinarian.