



What is it?

The liver plays many roles within the body including protein, carbohydrate and lipid metabolism, detoxification, bile metabolism, synthesis of blood coagulation factors, vitamin storage, blood filtration and metabolism of drugs. Liver disease is a generic term and can be caused by many underlying causes including chronic active hepatitis, infections, cancer, toxins, glucocorticoid or other drug administration, metabolic disease, congenital abnormalities, neighboring pancreatitis and many others. A complete work-up should include a thorough physical examination, blood work, diagnostic imaging and liver biopsy.

How is it treated?

The underlying cause of the liver disease will dictate the type of treatment. Mild forms of disease can be treated medically with pharmaceuticals designed to reverse the damage to the liver. In more severe cases, involving chronic disease or cancer, surgical intervention may be an option. Because liver disease affects so many parts of the body, medical management of all symptoms is important.

What is the prognosis for liver disease?

The prognosis for liver disease is more promising when disease is recognized and treated early. The liver is very resilient and can regenerate itself if some of it remains healthy. However the more severe and diffuse the disease, the worse the prognosis. A personalized treatment plan is important to slow the progression of liver disease. Talk to your veterinarian regarding the best treatment protocol for your animal companion.

What symptoms can present as the disease progresses?

Early Stages:

- Inappetance or anorexia
- Fever
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Progressive lethargy
- Discolored feces and/or urine
- Abdominal pain
- Increased water consumption and urination
- Weight loss

Late Stages:

- Persistent early stages
- Distended abdomen – due to liver enlargement or fluid buildup
- Bleeding problems – delayed clotting, bruising, hemorrhages
- Seizures
- Black/tarry stool
- Disorientation
- Icterus – yellowing of the skin membranes
- Organ failure
- Unable to rise

Crisis – Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of disease

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Crying/whining from pain*

**It should be noted that most animals will instinctually hide their pain. Vocalization of any sort that is out of the ordinary for your pet may indicate that their pain and anxiety has become too much for them to bear. If your pet vocalizes due to pain or anxiety, please consult with your tending veterinarian immediately.*

Common Signs of Pain

Panting, lameness, difficulty sleeping, pacing, abnormal posture, body tensing, poor grooming habits, tucked tail, dilated pupils, licking sore spot, muscle atrophy, decreased appetite, vocalizing/yowling, reclusive behavior, aggressive behavior, avoiding stairs/jumping, depressed, unable to stand.