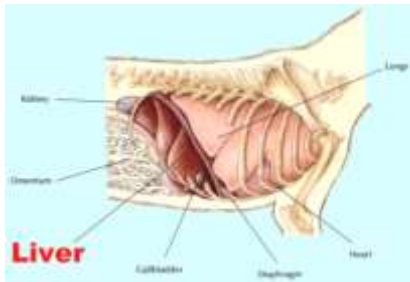




Liver Disease



The liver is the largest organ in the abdomen and has many important functions. The liver removes waste products from the body, it metabolizes nutrients (breaks them down into usable pieces), secretes bile which breaks down fat, and removes aged red blood cells which are no longer functioning.

The liver is responsible for proteins in the blood that cause clotting, maintaining blood pressure, and allowing steroid and thyroid binding. Working with the kidneys, the liver is also responsible for making Vitamin D usable by the body.

Causes

Several things can damage the liver. Infections, severe inflammation, attack by the immune system, cancer, or injury by toxins or drugs can all cause damage. Luckily, the liver has a limited ability to regenerate itself when damaged.

Signs

Signs of liver disease include vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite, weight loss, increased drinking, and increased urination.



Severe liver disease can cause jaundice (yellowing of the skin, eye, or gums), fluid in the abdomen, or seizures. During a physical examination, the doctor may also feel an enlarged liver.

Diagnosis

Routine bloodwork will find liver disease at an early stage. The bloodwork can tell if there is injury to the liver or if it is not functioning properly.

X-rays are important for determining the size of the liver and for looking for the cause such as cancer. X-rays can also determine if there is fluid in the abdomen because of a failing liver.



We will also perform additional testing such as liver specific blood tests or ultrasound.

Treatment

Treatment for liver disease may vary depending on the cause. Bacterial infections will require antibiotics while inflammatory causes require steroids.



Other diseases that cause liver damage will require very specific treatment. Cats develop liver disease (hepatic lipidosis) when they stop eating for several days. This treatment involves a feeding tube.

Supplements are available to help the liver regenerate itself and to protect it from toxins. Herbs, antioxidants, and fish oil will help. When giving certain medicine that can affect the liver, such as chronic oral steroids, it is wise to help prevent the liver injury before it starts by giving supplements.

Other Considerations

Pets with liver disease are not able to tolerate medicine as well since the liver metabolizes (breaks down) the drug for it to be removed from the body. If the liver



cannot efficiently remove the drug, it will stay in the body longer and at higher doses. The doctor will adjust the levels as needed or avoid certain medicines.

Anesthetic gases are also broken down the liver. Therefore, your doctor may want to delay anesthesia until the liver disease is less severe. When your pet does have anesthesia, lower doses are used.

Summary

As with many other conditions, early detection is best to keep your pet as healthy as possible. Regular blood tests will indicate problems before your pet is showing signs when treatment is often most effective.