

Liver Disease



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!

What is liver disease?

The term liver disease covers a wide range of conditions in which the liver functions less efficiently than normal. It is the largest internal organ and can be affected by almost everything that can go wrong in the body. This unique organ has a tremendous regenerative and reserve capacity and is able to function and regenerate itself, even if 70% of the liver mass is lost, once the problem has been resolved.

The liver has an estimated 1,500 functions to perform. It plays a central role in the digestion and conversion of nutrients, the removal of toxic substances, the synthesis of key components of the blood and the storage of vitamins and minerals.

Many liver disorders (such as those caused by viruses, bacteria, or damage by drugs and chemicals) result in inflammation - referred to as hepatitis. Severe, prolonged inflammation, if untreated, may cause healthy cells to be replaced by scar tissue. The liver's function can also be impaired by diseases elsewhere in the body and some pets are born with abnormal blood vessels that cause the liver to be bypassed, depriving it of nutrients.

Factors that can influence the likelihood of a dog or cat developing liver disease include:

- **Age**
- **Breed** e.g. Bedlington terriers, Yorkshire terriers and Siamese cats.
- **Environment** e.g. toxic chemicals
- **Body condition** e.g. overweight cats.



What are the signs of liver disease?

It may be difficult to recognise the signs of liver disease because the most common signs are the same as for many other disorders, i.e.

- Poor appetite.
- Depression.
- Vomiting & Diarrhoea.
- Loss of weight.
- Increased thirst in dogs.

Specific signs can be linked directly to liver disease but these would only be noted in severe cases, for example:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the gums, skin and the whites of the eyes)
- Abnormal nervous behaviour
- Swelling of the abdomen

How is liver disease diagnosed?

A thorough examination of your pet would be the first step and this may alert your vet to the possibility of liver disease. Because the physical signs of liver disease are similar to other disorders and not specific, your veterinary surgeon may use a number of procedures to help make a more precise diagnosis. These tests include.

- **Blood Tests** - These are able to detect biochemical changes, which indicate liver damage or abnormal liver function.
- **Liver Imaging** - Changes in shape, size or blood supply of the liver may be detected by using ultrasound or radiography.
- **Liver Biopsy** - A small sample of tissue is collected and examined in a laboratory for signs of liver disease.

How is liver disease treated and managed?

Depending on the severity and nature of the liver disorder, your vet will recommend appropriate measures, ranging from nutritional management to drug therapy and, in certain cases, surgery.

The liver has an amazing ability to repair and regenerate itself, provided that the cause of the disease does not persist. A couple of things your vet may suggest are.

- **Hills L-D** - Correct nutrition plays an important part in supplying the nutrients needed to help build new tissue and support a pet's recovery.
- **Zentonil** - It contains SAMe, which helps in the production of glutathione (a major antioxidant). It is very important to ensure a good supply of glutathione in a compromised liver to counteract the increased production of free radicals and the extent of oxidative stress suffered by liver cells.

Important

Liver disease can be indicated by a wide variety of abnormal signs. If you are in any doubt about your pet's health, please consult your veterinary surgeon.



