



Hepatic Lipidosis (Fatty Liver)

Hepatic Lipidosis (Fatty Liver) is a life threatening liver disease of cats. It can occur in cats that are experiencing anorexia and/or weight loss secondary to an illness, injury, or lack of food. Sometimes no underlying cause can be identified. Cats that are overweight or obese are at an increased risk for this disease.

The symptoms a cat with fatty liver may show are very vague. They include lethargy, weight loss, poor appetite and sometimes vomiting. There may also be a yellow tinge to their skin (jaundice). Diagnosis of fatty liver is based on physical exam, history, and blood tests. Sometimes radiographs (x-rays) and a liver biopsy are needed.

The treatment of a cat with fatty liver requires many things. The most important part of the regimen is food. These cats must eat a balanced, good protein diet. If they cannot or will not eat on their own, they must be helped. This may be as simple as hand feeding them 6-8 times a day or as significant as surgically placing a feeding tube in their esophagus or stomach so a liquid diet may be fed.

In addition to the nutritional support, any underlying disease must be treated. This frequently involves antibiotics, anti-vomiting medication, vitamins, appetite stimulants and intravenous fluid support. These cats are in a very fragile state and should be stressed as little as possible. Hospitalized cats should be visited by their families to help keep their attitude good and encourage eating.

Prevention of fatty liver falls in to 2 categories. The first is controlling the cat's weight. Cats with an appropriate body weight are at a much lower risk of fatty liver disease. An overweight cat that is on a weight loss plan needs to be watched carefully for any signs of ill health. Secondly, if an overweight cat should become ill, its' illness needs to be diagnosed and treated aggressively in order to prevent fatty liver from occurring secondary to the illness.

The prognosis for cats suffering from fatty liver varies greatly. If the cat is eating and not vomiting, greater than 70% survive with the proper supportive care. Survival also depends on any underlying illness or injury.

In summary, fatty liver is a very serious, life threatening disease seen in cats. Treatment must be rapid, aggressive, and sustained if the pet is to survive. This requires a commitment from the veterinary staff and more importantly from the cat's family. Recovery can take weeks to even months.