

WHAT IS IDIOPATHIC HEPATIC LIPIDOSIS?

Idiopathic hepatic lipidosis (IHL) is a liver disease that can affect cats of any age, breed or sex. It is also called fatty liver disease or fatty liver syndrome. Hepatic lipidosis occurs when a cat suffers a decrease in appetite or stops eating completely. Fat is processed by the liver and in some instances, it overwhelms the liver's metabolic capacity to metabolize it. Fat then begins to accumulate in the liver and starts to impair liver function.

Cats that are overweight are at a higher risk for developing this disease. Changes in diet, environment, and development of another illness may also predispose a pet to a decrease in appetite and development of hepatic lipidosis. It is possible to NEVER find a reason for the development of HL in which case it is termed idiopathic hepatic lipidosis (IHL).

Recent information suggests that some cats may have intestinal disease (inflammatory bowel disease) as a predisposing factor. If that is the case long term therapy may be required.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF IHL?

The first signs that owners may notice are: a loss of appetite, lethargy, and sporadic vomiting. Owners may even notice their cat has a yellow tinge to the tips of the ears or the whites of the eyes as a first sign.

HOW DO WE DIAGNOSE IHL?

IHL is usually diagnosed with a combination of a physical exam and routine blood tests to assess organ function. This is followed by an abdominal ultrasound with an aspirate of the liver or a liver biopsy.

HOW DO YOU TREAT IHL?

The cornerstone of therapy for IHL is nutritional support, often by a feeding tube of some type. Cats usually tolerate a tube feeding well, and odds are good for a complete recovery.