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## Feline Hepatic Lipidosis (FHL)

A marked and sustained loss of appetite is a sign of many feline diseases. Among the more serious of these is feline hepatic lipidosis (FHL), a condition in which fats (triglycerides) accumulate within a cat's liver cells. This condition is probably the most common liver ailment in cats.

Food avoidance most frequently occurs in animals that have something wrong with their gut or intestinal tract. It can be seen in cats with cardiac failure, neurologic problems and even dental disease. Also, cats depend very much on their sense of smell when they eat, so they have to have an oral-nasal organ that is working properly for them to want to eat. For example, a cat with a severe sinusitis, an upper respiratory infection, or ulcers in its mouth are at a greater risk for lipidosis.

Additionally, obese cats are at higher risk when they quit eating or the owners have abruptly put them on a weight-reduction diet. If a cat decides you are feeding it bad tasting food, it'll go on a fast and it can get very sick. Patients are usually middle aged cats, but it can be seen in cats ranging from three months to 25 years of age.

In a cat who is anorexic, excessive amounts of fat move to the liver from storage areas throughout the body to compensate for the lack of fat that would normally be consumed through its food. The liver is unable to process this excessive intake of fat, and so it collects in the animal's liver cells. Cats will become reclusive, avoiding their food bowl, some won't even go near it as if they were afraid of it. In fact when they see their dish they may move away quickly and just sit there salivating. If they don't eat a little bit, they may vomit soon afterward. Also, they may become jaundiced (yellow tinged to their skin) in their ears and on their gums. In extremely severe cases, an anorexic cat may acquire a bleeding disorder, its eyesight may become noticeably weaker and the animal may have seizures or manifest other signs of neurologic abnormality. The warning signs of FHL can go on for days or weeks.

If FHL is suspected, some thorough tests for diagnosis can be preformed. First, a physical exam and some blood work should be done. An analysis of liver tissue samples and possible ultrasound imaging should also be done.

Treatment is to nourish an affected cat immediately by means of intravenous fluids, vitamin supplements and feeding by means of a stomach tube. Constant monitoring of a stricken cat's conditions is also crucial. It is important that the owner realizes that this is not cheap or cannot be done at home. Most animals will have to be hospitalized and usually, within a week or 10 days it can be determined if they will survive. If the cat is successfully treated for early-stage FHL and sent home, it is the owners duty to continue to tube feed the cat for up to a month. The technique can be learned from the veterinarian. The good news is, cats are not apt to sustain any long term damage to their liver.