

FELINE FATTY LIVER SYNDROME

What is the Fatty Liver Syndrome, and how does a cat get it?

The feline Fatty Liver Syndrome (FLS) is also known as feline hepatic lipidosis. This disease is peculiar to cats and is one of the most common liver diseases seen in cats.

The typical cat with the FLS has recently gone through a period of anorexia (not eating). The chances of the FLS occurring are greater if the cat was obese before the anorexia began. As fat is broken down to supply nutrients for the anorectic cat, the fat is deposited so rapidly in the liver that it cannot be processed. It becomes stored in and around the liver cells, resulting in liver failure. The cat usually becomes icteric or jaundiced, as evidenced by a yellow color in the whites of the eyes or in the skin. At this point, the disease will be fatal if not treated rapidly and aggressively.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis of the FLS is made from blood tests for liver function and from a liver biopsy or aspirate. The former may be performed during surgery or with a needle inserted through the skin. The tissue sample is sent to a pathologist for interpretation. The latter involves inserting a very tiny needle through the skin and into the liver, removing a small number of liver cells, and examining those cells under the microscope. The FLS cat will have a large amount of fat in and among the liver cells. Generally, other tests are then performed to determine why the cat quit eating. If the cause for anorexia is treatable or resolved, the prognosis is reasonably good.

Is this a treatable disease?

This disease is very treatable, but treatment of the FLS requires that the cat receive nutritional support until the appetite returns. A consistently high quality diet will allow the liver to resume functioning so it may remove the fat. This does not occur quickly; it takes an average of 6-7 weeks. Therefore, a method of force feeding must be used to allow you to feed your cat at home.

How do I provide the necessary nutritional support?

A feeding tube is surgically implanted into your cat so you can syringe special food through it into the stomach. There are several types of feeding tube. The best one for your cat will be determined based on several factors.

A special food mixture, listed below, is syringed through the tube three to five times per day. This food is formulated to meet the cat's nutritional needs; it should not cause vomiting or diarrhea. To feed your cat, follow these steps:

Place the following ingredients in a blender and run it at the liquefy (fastest) speed until the food is uniformly mixed. After mixing, pour the food through a kitchen strainer.

2. Remove the cap from the feeding tube.

3. Using the syringe provided, inject _____ cc of the food into your cat's feeding tube _____ times per day FOR A TOTAL OF _____ cc PER 24 HOURS. It is helpful to inject the food slowly, about 1 cc per second, and to elevate your cat's front feet so the food goes easily into the stomach.

4. When the food has been injected, inject 5-10 cc of tap water through the tube so food does not remain in it; replace the cap in the tube.

5. Any remaining food should be stored in the refrigerator. Before the next feeding, it should be warmed to body temperature under hot tap water or in a microwave oven. If you heat it in a microwave oven, be sure to thoroughly mix the contents prior to feeding because of uneven heating. Also, always check the temperature prior to feeding to be sure that it is not too hot.

When is the tube removed?

Persistence is essential. The average cat requires 6-7 weeks of feeding before it begins to eat. At least once weekly, offer your cat a small amount of its favorite food so that you will know when its appetite returns. The feeding tube will not hinder eating in any way. After your cat has been eating well for 3-4 days, it should be returned to the hospital for tube removal. Removal of the tube is simple and does not require anesthesia; however, you should not attempt to remove the tube yourself.

NOTE: Technically, a cubic centimeter (cc) and a milliliter (mL) are different. However, for our purposes, a cc is the same as a mL. Syringes are marked in cc's.