

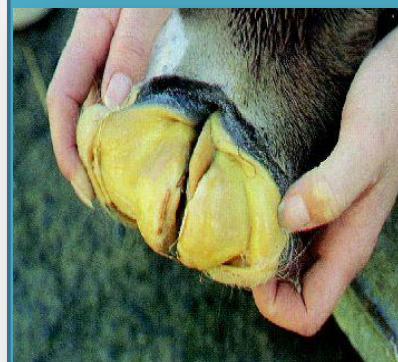


LIVER DISEASE

The liver has many jobs, including removal of toxins, metabolism of drugs and metabolism of food. Liver disease is uncommon in the horse. It can be caused by toxicities (such as Ragwort poisoning), accumulation of fat within the liver (lipidosis) or ascending bacterial infection from the gut.

The liver has a large reserve capacity so often clinical signs will not be obvious until at least 70% of the liver is affected. Clinical signs may include depression, poor appetite, loss of body condition, poor coat condition, or icteric (yellow coloured) mucous membranes. The build up of toxins in the blood can promote photosensitization of white haired skin (skin crusting may occur).

We can identify liver disease using blood tests to check for enzymes which are released into the blood stream when liver cells are damaged. Further tests such as liver biopsies may be required to identify the cause of liver disease. This is when we put a needle through the body wall and into the liver to obtain a tiny section of tissue which we can then send to the lab for testing. This test will often give us a clearer idea of the extent of liver damage and the prognosis for your horse.



Treatment for liver disease is often supportive. It may include dietary modification, supplements, and antibiotics if we suspect bacterial infection. Some horses may need fluid therapy. Recovery is often possible, as the liver can regenerate, but it can be a long process.



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