

# Chronic Active Hepatitis

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker. Today, we're going to discuss chronic active hepatitis. Chronic active hepatitis is also called CAH, which is a condition in which a pet is dealing with persistent and progressive inflammation of the liver. The word "active" means the cells of the liver are continually becoming inflamed and dying. Over time, this inflammatory process replaces normal liver tissue with scar tissue, resulting in a condition known as cirrhosis of the liver or scarring of the liver.

CAH is more common in dogs than cats, and is sometimes called chronic canine inflammatory hepatic disease. CAH is seen across all breeds of dogs, both genders and at any age, though it is more common in middle-aged to older female pets. Certain breeds are predisposed to the disease, including Bedlington terriers, doberman pinschers, Skye terriers, standard poodles, cocker spaniels, and West Highland white terriers.

Most cases of chronic active hepatitis have no known cause. However, certain diseases can lead to CAH, including infectious canine hepatitis caused by adenovirus I, leptospirosis, copper storage disease, autoimmune disease, and drug and chemical toxicities. Aflatoxins found in moldy grains can also cause the condition, and that's one of the reasons that I advocate pets to not consume any dry food containing grains: corns, wheat, soy, or rice. In addition, the way in which an animal's immune system responds to liver inflammation may contribute to the progressive worsening of the condition.

## Symptoms and Diagnosis

Symptoms of chronic active hepatitis can include sluggishness, lack of appetite, vomiting and weight loss, excessive thirst and urination, yellowish discoloration of the gums and skin which is called jaundice, fluid build-up in the abdomen called ascites, poor body condition, and neurological symptoms such as dullness or seizures caused by a build-up of ammonia in the body. Diagnostic tests your veterinarian will need to run include a variety of blood tests, including a blood-clotting profile, urinalysis, serum bile acids, ammonia levels, abdominal X-rays and/or ultrasound, liver biopsy, and culture and sensitivity because sometimes there can be a liver infection involved as well.

## Treatment

Treatment of CAH focuses on dealing with any underlying cause of the disease, decreasing inflammation within the liver, supporting its recovery, and attempting to stop the progression of the disease. Very ill pets must be hospitalized and treated aggressively. They will need to receive intravenous (IV) fluid therapy to treat dehydration that could've come from severe vomiting or diarrhea as well as anorexia.

Any drugs that must be cleared by the liver should be stopped immediately. Medications may be given to decrease fluid build-up in the abdomen, enhance bile flow, treat any infection that could be present and treat GI ulceration that could also be present, alleviating brain swelling if present to control seizures, and decreasing ammonia production as well as absorption into the body. As well as eliminating copper from the liver and decreasing liver scarring.

Holistic vets, including myself, may also supplement these patients with supplemental zinc, vitamin K, S-adenosylmethionine (SAMe), milk thistle, n-acetyl cysteine (NAC), glutathione as well as a variety of

Chinese herbs that can be very beneficial. Nutritional support and dietary management will also be necessary. I strongly recommend discontinuing all processed foods for these animals and begin an organic fresh food diet that is excellent with high-quality protein, fresh fruits and veggies that are loaded with detoxifying antioxidants, and balanced for patients with liver dysfunction, which usually means lower copper levels that are found in traditional pet foods.

Chronic active hepatitis is a difficult disease to treat, and actually, it's rarely cured. If it goes undiagnosed or inadequately treated and monitored, CAH can progress to cirrhosis of the liver and ultimately, fatal liver disease. But with consistent care and monitoring, the progression of the disease can often be slowed, and the animal can enjoy a very good quality of life.

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