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If your cat isn't eating, it could be liver disease

"My cat has very strange-looking orange urine and is very depressed. What should I do?" Mrs. Gonzalez asked on the phone. My receptionist told



DR. ELAINE
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THE CAT
DOCTOR

her that she should bring Sunny down to the veterinary clinic as soon as possible. Sunny was normally a very large, buff-colored cat, and when Mrs. Gonzalez placed the cat on the examination table, I was surprised to see how sunken and saggy he looked. Sunny had dropped from his typical 18 pounds to 14 pounds without the aid of a diet. He hadn't eaten a thing in three days.

An exam showed Sunny was jaundiced. He did not have a fever, but he was dehydrated and lethargic. At this point I was not sure what had started Sunny's illness, but I was extremely concerned that he had developed a condition called hepatic lipidosis, also known as "fatty liver" disease.

Hepatic lipidosis usually

occurs in overweight cats that do not eat for a couple of days. Loss of appetite can be due to simple things like a viral infection, but the result is impaired liver function and an increasingly sick cat.

Sunny was hospitalized and started on intravenous fluids. His blood was sent to a lab for analysis, and we performed a urinalysis in-house. The urinalysis showed that his kidneys were working OK.

We immediately began trying to get him to eat. He refused, but my technician was able to force-feed him with a strained canned cat food and a syringe. Sunny, normally a voracious eater, was not interested in food and about 20 minutes after he was fed, he vomited. He was started on some injectable anti-vomiting medication.

He was also started on injectable antibiotics. When hand-fed small amounts of food frequently, Sunny did not vomit, but he still did not want to eat on his own.

After blood tests and an ultrasound, a biopsy was taken and confirmed my tentative diagnosis of hepatic lipidosis, and no other liver disease was found. Sunny was sent home with his feeding tube in place.

His owner continued his feedings, antibiotics and anti-vomiting medications. It took her a couple of days to get comfortable with his care, but she became a real pro. Despite all of this care, Sunny was still not eating a week later. This did not surprise me because it can take weeks for a lipidotic cat to resume eating. Mrs. Gonzalez did not give up.

After three weeks, Sunny began to eat on his own. His owner was thrilled and was able to reduce the amount of feeding through his tube. When his appetite returned to normal and his physical condition was stable, the tube was removed. Sunny was put on a measured portion diet to prevent another episode of hepatic lipidosis.

The lesson to learn is that it's not normal for a cat to stop eating. If anorexia persists for more than a day, get your cat into your veterinarian's office.

The doctor will need to decide which course of treatment and diagnostics are needed. Not every anorexic cat needs a feeding tube to get well, but for many, it is the difference between success and failure.

Dr. Wexler-Mitchell owns
The Cat Care Clinic in
Orange: www.catcare.com