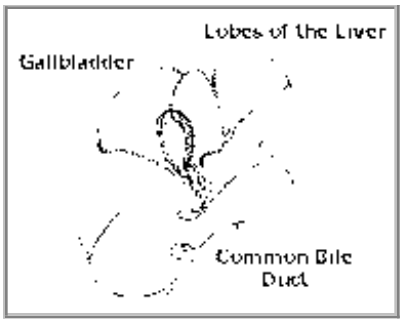
Diseases of the Gallbladder & Bile Duct in Cats

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

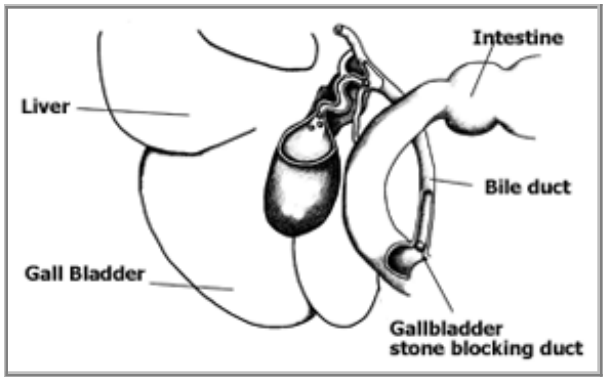


The gallbladder is a balloon-like structure which lies between lobes of the liver. Bile is made in the liver and drains through ducts into the gallbladder where it is stored and concentrated. The bile helps the body digest ingested fats. It is released into the small intestine through a tube called the bile duct.

Vomiting, jaundice, and lack of appetite are common in animals with inflammation or obstruction of the biliary tract (series of ducts leading from the liver to the gall bladder and then to the intestine). Fever and abdominal discomfort may also occur.

Diseases of the gallbladder are divided into three categories: obstructive disease, nonobstructive disease, and rupture of the gallbladder or extrahepatic biliary ducts.

Obstructive bile duct disease



Obstructive disease may occur when the pancreas is inflamed or scarred and compresses the bile duct. If the inflammation of the pancreas can be reduced, the pressure on the duct is relieved and bile can flow normally again. Cancers may also cause compression of the bile ducts.

Choleliths (gallbladder stones) may form in the gallbladder. They can be an incidental (present but not causing any problem) finding on radiographs or at surgery. Gallstones which pass from the gallbladder into the bile duct may block the flow of bile.

Nonobstructive gallbladder disease

Nonobstructive disease such as cholecystitis (inflammation of the gallbladder) is typically due to a bacterial infection and often is cured with antibiotics. Cancer of the gallbladder is rare but may also cause inflammation.

Rupture of the biliary system

Rupture of the gallbladder may be caused by physical trauma (hit by a car), cholecystitis, or obstruction. Early detection is vital since the leaking bile causes peritonitis. Surgical exploration and repair is necessary to save these patients.

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