

Is Elevated Liver Count in Dog Bad News?

A dog with an elevated liver count may be just fine.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I just took my 7-year-old West Highland White Terrier to the vet. Her blood work revealed that her "liver count was up." She is going to have follow-up blood tests soon. What do think they are looking for?

A. The results of routine lab tests can sometimes come back as abnormal, and this can wreak emotional havoc on dog owners and human patients alike.

Although early detection of disease is important to successful treatment, there are often circumstances where one or more of the values are up for no apparent reasons. The result can be expensive follow-up tests, anxiety, and possibly unnecessary treatments that carry significant side effects.

If your dog has routine screening tests, it is important to match up any clinical signs, or symptoms, with abnormal test results to help determine if the out-of-range result is significant and warrants follow-up.

In the case of liver tests, it is not unusual for one or two of the liver enzymes to be mildly to moderately elevated in a middle-aged dog. However, if there were to be signs such as vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, fever, loss of appetite or other changes that went along with the abnormal results, there would be more urgency.

Tests such as liver biopsies and ultrasounds can end up being costly wild goose chases for dog owners if there are no clinical signs to confirm possible liver disease.

I would discuss the need for further testing with your veterinarian, specifically asking what diseases are being considered. If your dog has been acting normal, it would not be unreasonable to suggest re-testing in another year, or sooner if anything changes.

One exception to this suggestion is in geriatric dogs (more than 10 years old). It is important to closely follow any abnormal blood values, and twice-a-year routine testing is recommended.