



High Liver Enzymes: What They Mean (and Don't)

The calm read on a raised liver result, before you Google yourself into a fright

PETSLIKEMINE
LIVER & GALLBLADDER

PET NAME

SPECIES / BREED

DATE OF RESULT

A raised liver enzyme is one of the most common things found on a routine blood test, very often in a dog who feels completely well and was only checked before an anaesthetic or as a senior screen. It is a **sign, not a diagnosis**. It means "look here", not "your pet has liver disease". Take a breath: for a lot of pets the number is a nudge to find out more, not the start of a crisis.

THE ONE THAT GETS MISREAD: ALT VERSUS ALP

TWO NUMBERS, TWO VERY DIFFERENT STORIES

ALT leaks from liver cells when they are being damaged, so a raised ALT is the one that points reasonably squarely at the liver itself, right now. *ALP* is the great impersonator: it goes up with steroids (given or from Cushing's disease), with growing or healing bone, and in some perfectly healthy breeds for benign reasons, so a high ALP is often **not the liver at all**. This is why a single raised value, especially ALP, is not a diagnosis and cannot tell you on its own how worried to be.

WATCH, OR WORK IT UP? THE RULE OF THUMB

USUALLY A RECHECK

A **mild** rise in a pet who is **well** in every other way, eating, bright, normal weight, no yellow tinge, is very often just rechecked in a few weeks to see whether it settles or is drifting up.

TIME TO WORK IT UP

A **high** or **rising** level, **any** symptom at all (off food, sickness, drinking more, a yellow tinge, a wobbly or vacant spell), or **function** markers slipping, all tip the balance towards investigating properly rather than waiting.

THE WORK-UP LADDER, ONE RUNG AT A TIME

- 1 Recheck the bloods.** Repeat the panel, often after a short fast, to see whether it was a blip, is steady, or is climbing. Half the answer is in the direction of travel.
- 2 Bile acids.** A simple before-and-after-food blood test that asks the real question: is the liver still doing its job? It sorts a busy enzyme from a struggling liver.
- 3 Ultrasound.** A painless scan that lets your vet look at the liver's shape and texture, the gallbladder, and the blood vessels around it.
- 4 Biopsy.** When it is needed, a tissue sample is the only thing that names the exact problem and points to the right treatment. It is a step taken with care, not a first move.

THE THING TO HOLD ON TO

No one can tell you what a raised enzyme means from the number alone, and nobody should start a special diet, a copper-restricted food, or a supplement on the strength of one result or a breed name. The number opens a question. The ladder above, walked with your vet, is how it gets answered.

Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway MRCVS and Claire Greenway BVM&S MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet's instructions.

How to use. Bring your result and this sheet to your vet, and ask which rung of the ladder your pet is on and why. A raised enzyme is a starting point for a conversation, not a verdict. This sheet explains; it does not diagnose.

A SIGN TO LOOK CLOSER, NOT A DIAGNOSIS