

CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE IN CATS

What causes chronic kidney disease?

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) refers to a non-reversible condition whereby the kidneys are no longer able to function efficiently. The disease is most commonly seen in middle aged to older cats. With the majority of cats it is a disease that worsens over time with a gradual loss in functioning kidney tissue. The speed of this is variable between cats, with progression over several months to several years. In the majority of cats the cause of CKD is unknown but there are some causes such as polycystic kidney disease, tumours, infections or toxins that can be identified. Some of these are treatable and can stop or slow the progression of the disease.

What are the symptoms of kidneys disease?

One of the main functions of the kidney is to filter out toxins from the blood and remove them from the body in the form of urine. Being originally desert animals, cats have evolved to preserve body water by producing small amounts of very concentrated urine and so one of the early signs of kidney failure is that cats start to produce larger volumes of more watery urine. In order to avoid getting dehydrated, affected cats will be seen to drink more water than normal.

As kidney failure progresses, the toxins which the kidney would normally remove from the body start to accumulate in the blood stream leading to symptoms such as appetite loss, nausea, lethargy, weight loss, mouth ulcers, halitosis (bad breath), vomiting and diarrhoea.

How is kidney disease diagnosed?

Your vet may suspect kidney disease if we notice the above clinical signs. A diagnosis is made through blood and urine testing. If chronic kidney disease is suspected, they may consider further tests such as x-rays, ultrasounds, or biopsies. As high pressure is common in cats with CKD, your veterinary team should check your cat's blood pressure regularly.

How is kidney disease managed?

Once kidney tissue is damaged the body is unable to regenerate it and so treatment is aimed at helping your cat cope with its remaining kidney function and to slow the progression of the disease.

Diets: Special veterinary diets are recommended to reduce the workload on the failing kidneys. These have been shown to be very important in improving life expectancy. The diets are moderately protein restricted, this has been shown to reduce the levels of some of the toxins we see in CKD in the cats blood stream. They are also higher in potassium, anti-oxidants and fatty acids. The diets are low in phosphorus too. Feeding a wet diet instead of a dry diet to increase water intake in the diet can help too.

Water: It is also important to make sure your cat drinks plenty of water since they have a much higher risk of becoming dehydrated. This can be achieved for example by having more water bowls around the house, using drinking fountains, flavouring the water or mixing small

amounts of water into the food. You can get additional liquid supplements such as hydracare by purina to help too.

Supplements: Phosphate binders might be recommended to be added to the diet if your cat's phosphorus is high on blood tests. Potassium supplements can also be recommended if your cat's potassium is low. There are lots of options and many are designed to be palatable or mix with the food to make administration easy.

Medicine: We may prescribe medications to reduce blood pressure. This medication can prevent worsening of the disease and also other health problems associated with high blood pressure such as blindness. Cats with CKD can become anaemic and in very severe cases we may use medications to try and treat this. We can also use supportive medications such as appetite stimulants and anti-sickness drugs to help ease the symptoms of the disease.

Monitoring your cat at home

It is important that you monitor your cat closely especially how much food and water they are consuming since changes in this can be a sign of the condition worsening. Cats with CKD are very prone to dehydration so early intervention if appetite decreases can be vital in preventing worsening of disease. Other signs such as vomiting, lethargy or pungent odour from the mouth should prompt further veterinary attention.

Nurse/ vet check

We would advise regular monitoring of your cat's blood pressure, urine samples and weight with one of our vets or in our nurse clinics. This will allow us to check the progression of the kidney disease and address any additional issues.