

Chronic kidney failure in Cats

In addition to controlling electrolyte levels, pH levels, and hydration status, the kidneys function to remove toxic wastes from our blood and pass it out of the body in the urine. When these toxins are not adequately filtered out, overall illness can develop. Chronic kidney failure refers to the disease process where the kidneys have not been able to perform at least one of their many tasks adequately for an extended period of time (months to years). With medical and nutritional intervention, the goal is to slow that progression and get to a point where the patient feels good while living with the disease. We cannot cure kidney failure, although in many cases we are able to control the problem and provide the animal with a good quality of life.

While the majority of cases of kidney failure are idiopathic or have no specific cause, there are certain medical conditions that can lead to chronic failure. Those conditions can include inherited or congenital kidney disease, ingestion of substances toxic to the kidneys, high blood calcium, or glomerulonephritis. Other conditions include kidney infections, polycystic kidney disease, kidney stones or chronic urinary obstruction.

Common symptoms indicating kidney disease may be of concern:

Excessive thirst and excessive urination

Dehydration

Vomiting/nausea

Decreased appetite

Weight loss

Weakness/Stumbling

An owner may notice lethargy, drinking from strange water sources and increased amount of urine in the litter box. Also included may be mouth sores, bad breath, and the inability for the cat to do normal activities without quickly becoming tired.

When the kidneys first enter failure the body will try to compensate by taking in large amounts of water and increasing urination to flush the toxins from the body. Eventually, the kidney disease will progress and the more serious results of the disease will result.

Common tests in diagnosing kidney disease include, but are not limited to:

Urinalysis

Tests for signs of infection, amount of protein passed into the urine, and the concentrating ability kidneys in making urine; failing kidneys cannot make concentrated urine and the patient must drink excessively to get enough water to rid the body of toxins.

Hematocrit

Hematocrit is a measure of red blood cells in circulation. The hormone erythropoietin, which stimulates the production of red blood cells, is made by the kidney. The failing kidneys does not make this hormone in normal amounts which can lead to anemia and generalized weakness.

Blood Urea Nitrogen (BUN) and Creatinine

These are products (toxins) of protein metabolism in the body that are normally excreted by the kidneys in the urine.

Potassium

Failing kidneys are unable to conserve potassium efficiently. A common sign of low blood potassium is weakness and inability to hold up the head.

Phosphorus

The calcium/phosphorus levels become unbalanced in kidney failure due to the inability of the failing kidneys to properly excrete phosphorus. The tissues can then develop mineralized deposits which often times causes pain for the animal.

Blood Pressure

It is important to monitor this factor in patients with kidney disease as there is a tendency for hypertension to develop with kidney failure. Another function of the kidneys is the production of renin which regulates blood pressure

Depending on a patient's state of kidney disease or failure, special medications, fluid therapy, prescription diets and a treatment/monitoring program can be developed by your veterinarian to suite your pet's specific needs.

Animal Clinic of Granger