

KIDNEY DISEASE IN CATS

Normal kidneys filter the blood, removing wastes and excreting them in the urine. The kidneys are also responsible for producing the hormone that stimulates the production of red blood cells and for helping maintain a normal balance of electrolytes in the body. Damaged kidneys lose some of their filtering ability, and waste products accumulate in the bloodstream. Chronic kidney disease also results in decreased red blood cell numbers (anemia) and imbalances of electrolytes such as potassium, calcium, and phosphorus. The body has a remarkable ability to compensate for minor kidney damage. About three-fourths of kidney tissue must be damaged before signs of illness appear. For this reason, kidney disease has often been present for a long time by the time we detect it, even though your pet may not have shown signs for very long.

In young cats causes of kidney disease include severe kidney infection, exposure to poisonous substances (antifreeze being the most common), and birth defects causing malfunctioning kidneys. Additional causes in older pets include high blood pressure, cancer, and age related changes. In many cases, the exact cause of kidney disease is not determined.

Early signs of kidney disease include increased thirst and urination. As the disease progresses, cats develop vomiting, decreased appetite, dehydration, depression, weight loss, and bad breath. Continued untreated illness results in collapse, seizures, coma, and death. Kidney disease is diagnosed using routine blood and urine tests. In some cases, x-rays, urine cultures, or kidney biopsies are needed to diagnose the cause of kidney damage. Once a pet has been diagnosed with kidney disease, we usually recommend regular blood tests to monitor the condition.

The majority of kidney disease is not curable but can often be controlled. Many pets can live reasonably normal lives when properly managed in a cooperative effort between owner and veterinarian.

Treatment of kidney disease varies depending on the cause and severity of the problem. The following is a list of treatments that may be used in treating your pet:

- ❑ Intravenous fluids—These are often used initially in the hospital to reduce the build up of toxins in the bloodstream and to correct for dehydration and electrolyte imbalances.
- ❑ SQ fluids—These may be given at home or in the hospital to help prevent dehydration and to help flush toxins from the body.
- ❑ Antibiotics—A prolonged course may be prescribed if your pet is determined to have a kidney or bladder infection.
- ❑ Tumil K—This is a potassium supplement that helps maintain normal electrolyte balance. Low potassium levels can lead to weakness and heart problems.
- ❑ Amphogel—This is a phosphate binder used to decrease absorption of phosphorus from the diet. High phosphate levels lead to inappetance and mineralization of tissues on the body.

- ❑ Epogen—This synthetic hormone is used to treat anemia in patients whose kidneys are not producing enough red blood cell stimulating hormone. Anemia can cause weakness and lethargy.
- ❑ Reglan or Pepsid—These medications are used to control the vomiting that may result from increased toxins in the bloodstream.
- ❑ Norvasc—This medication may be prescribed if your cat has high blood pressure. High blood pressure can lead to blindness, internal organ damage, and strokes.
- ❑ K/D or N/F diet—These diets are specially formulated for cats in kidney disease.

The majority of cats with kidney disease are managed at home. Follow the steps below to prolong the quality of your pet's life:

1. Give all medication as directed. If you cannot give the medication, call the clinic.
2. Closely monitor your pet's appetite. If your cat refuses to eat the prescribed diet, try mixing it with normal food or treats. If your cat still refuses to eat, call the clinic.
3. Make sure your pet has free access to clean drinking water at all times.
4. Monitor your cat's water consumption and urination. If you notice any major changes, please notify the clinic.
5. If you will be gone, arrange for someone else to give the prescribed medication. We can board your cat at the clinic or give you the names of qualified pet sitters.