

Chronic Kidney Disease



Basics

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is the loss of kidney function over time. Healthy kidneys perform many important functions, mainly making urine and filtering the blood. As kidney function decreases and waste products build up in the blood, a variety of health problems can arise for your pet.

Signs and Symptoms

It is important to note that animals have a large kidney reserve, meaning that over 75% of kidney function must be lost before you notice any changes in your pet. Once clinical signs do occur, they can be varied and affect many different body systems.

One of the earliest signs you may notice at home is **weight loss, lethargy, poor hair coat** and an **increase in drinking and urinating**. Your pet may **stop eating** or even start **vomiting**. They can develop **ulcers** inside the mouth and **bad breath**. Kidney disease can affect their blood pressure which can cause issues with the eyes, brain and heart. They may also become anaemic (have low red blood cells numbers).

Diagnostics

If your vet is concerned your pet may have kidney disease, a blood test is usually recommended. This can detect a build-up of waste products in the blood that kidneys should remove.

A urine examination is also performed to detect kidney disease and other potential causes such as infections.

Ultrasounds are useful to image the bladder and kidneys and may allow us to diagnose other possible causes such as cysts and cancer.

Chronic kidney disease is one of the most common diseases in older cats

Treatment

There is no definitive cure for chronic kidney disease. There are however treatments we can use to improve and prolong the lives of affected pets.

Dietary change is the most important part of management. Special diets have been developed for pets with CKD and have restricted levels of protein, phosphorous and salt while being high in other important ingredients like anti-oxidants. It can be difficult to change your pet's diet so make sure you transition slowly and get help if you need it from your vet or nurse. Remember that not eating at all is worse for your pet, so if they won't eat their new food, offer their old food again.

More targeted treatments are available for the variety of other conditions that occur in patients with CKD and will be recommended based your pet's individual needs. These can include blood pressure medications, oral medications to reduce protein loss in the urine and phosphate binders.

If your pet is unwell at the time of diagnosis, they will likely spend a time in hospital recovering. There they will receive fluid through a drip, anti-nausea medication and any other medication and nursing care they require.

Monitoring

Monitoring of patients with CKD is crucial to their quality of life.

We recommend that all older pets get regular blood tests to allow us to pick up conditions like CKD early.

Once your pet has been diagnosed, regular check-ups and communications with your vet will help maintain a high quality of life. Medication recommendations can change and, because of the nature of the disease, monitoring for development of disease in different body systems is important (eg regular blood pressure checks).

Blood tests allow your vet to monitor the progression of the kidney disease and can help to guide you through the disease process. Unfortunately, CKD is invariably fatal and (while not all pets will die directly from CKD) the illness always worsens.

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