



Kidney failure in cats

Kidney failure is a very common condition in cats, particularly as they get older. Your vet may suspect this with a history of your cat being unusually thirsty at home, or possibly urinating more. However this sign is very non-specific and can reflect a number of different conditions of which kidney disease is only one possible cause of many.

Diagnosis of kidney failure requires a blood sample to assess the level of kidney toxins in your cat's blood stream. The kidney normally eliminates these toxins from the system, but when it is struggling to function properly, these can build up causing various problems. Sometimes your vet may also request a urine sample as this can help distinguish a truly abnormal blood result from one complicated by the effects of a patient not being fully hydrated. Additionally, some kidney disease can result in abnormal protein loss in the urine and in this situation, additional treatments may be required.

Once a diagnosis of kidney failure has been made, your vet will talk to you about various treatment options tailored to your pet's needs. Unfortunately there is no specific cure for kidney failure, but depending on your pet's underlying condition, various options may be available.

A. WATER INTAKE

Although excessive thirst is commonly reported in cats with kidney disease and is an indicator that something may be wrong, it is important to encourage your cat to continue to drink as it is the body's way of trying to re-hydrate itself. In fact, one of the most important things you can do at home to help your cat's kidneys in this situation is to promote water intake. There are a number of ways you can do this:

1) Provide multiple food bowls around the house.

If you have more than one cat, this is particularly important – there should be a minimum of one water bowl per cat, plus an additional bowl. To encourage further water intake it may help to have a water bowl in every room. Additionally, many cats prefer to have their water kept away from their food, stemming evolutionarily from a need to prevent water sources being contaminated by the remains of their prey.

2) Use a container your cat likes

Cats can be very fussy as to what they drink out of. Many cats prefer a metal water bowl, and when filled with water, the cat can see his or her reflection and that of anyone approaching them. This can make them feel more secure that they are aware of their surroundings whilst they have their head in a vulnerable position. Placing the bowl away from the wall so they can face into the room also makes cats feel more secure, and happier to drink for a longer period of time. Cats often like to drink from cups or glasses as well.

3) Use the water that your cat likes.

Some cats are happy to drink tap water. However others prefer rainwater or bottled water. In addition many cats like dripping taps which can encourage more water intake. An alternative to this is a 'water fountain'. These can be plugged in and pump water round a small tray providing a constant trickle of water.



4) Make the water more palatable

A tiny bit of chicken or fish stock (preferable low salt), or water from tinned fish (freshwater, not in brine) can be added to drinking water. This water can also be used to make ice cubes that can then be added conveniently to a water bowl each day to easily flavour it.

5) Ideally feed wet pouches/tinned food, rather than dry food to increase water intake.

For severe cases, your pet may benefit from being hospitalised for intravenous fluids to be administered via a drip line. This is a form of dialysis that can help flush out some of the toxins that may be accumulating.

B) DIETARY MODIFICATION

A lot of work has gone into formulating diets that have a direct beneficial effect on organ function. One of the most effective of these diets is those formulated for the kidneys – in fact dietary modification has been shown to be the most effective treatment for kidney failure to help the kidneys function in the easiest way. Such diets are often supplemented with potassium and other elements that are lost from failing kidneys, and conversely restricted in various substances such as phosphate, that are not eliminated from the body in patient's with kidney disease. If your pet is started on a special 'renal' diet, it is important that this comprises the mainstay of their diet, as it is the ratio of various components that is so important, and this will be affected if you feed other foods as well.

C) MEDICATIONS

Depending on your pet's results, other medications may be warranted. This is particularly so if your pet is losing protein in their urine, which may suggest a medication would help reduce this, and the subsequent deterioration on kidney function that protein loss can cause.

Additionally, high blood pressure is a common finding in cats with kidney failure which can exacerbate the kidneys' loss in function. Measuring blood pressure is a simple procedure requiring just a small patch of fur to be clipped on one of your pet's paws for a small probe to be placed. An inflatable cuff is placed higher up on the leg & a blood pressure measurement can then be taken. Depending on your pet's temperament this may be taken during a routine appointment, or we may ask you to leave your pet with us for a few hours to acclimatise him/herself with us & reduce effects of stress on readings. This procedure is performed conscious and is non-invasive & painless. If high blood pressure is diagnosed, this will also require tablets to help control it and prevent further effects on the kidneys as well as other organs.

We do hope your pet responds to the various management changes your vet has recommended. Although kidney failure cannot be cured, many cats will respond well and regain and retain a good quality of life for considerable periods of time. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about your cat and his/her condition.