

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

What is it?

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is another term for kidney failure. CKD is commonly seen in middle-aged to older cats. It has been estimated that 20-50% of cats, over the age of 15 years, will have CKD. Chronic kidney disease refers to long-term damage to the kidneys. This can be caused by several conditions such as kidney infections, kidney tumours, toxins, polycystic kidney disease (more often seen in Persians) or inflammation in the kidneys. However, most commonly the cause of CKD is unknown.

What are the signs?

The signs of kidney disease can often start very subtly and increase in severity over time.

The most common signs that are seen are:

- Weight loss
- Poor appetite
- Increased drinking
- Increased urination
- Lethargy

Other signs seen may include:

- Anaemia
- Vomiting
- Poor coat condition
- Weakness
- Bad breath
- High blood pressure

How is it diagnosed?

CKD is diagnosed with blood and urine tests. The blood values used to assess the kidneys include Creatinine, Urea, and SDMA.



These values increase as the CKD progresses. These values can help your vet to 'stage' your cat's kidney disease. SDMA provides an earlier marker for assessing kidney disease. Other blood markers that can be affected by CKD include: low potassium, high phosphate and low red blood cell levels (anaemia).

A urine test will help to determine how well the kidneys are concentrating. In CKD, they lose the ability to concentrate urine effectively, which can lead to dehydration, despite their increased thirst. The test also shows how much protein is being lost by the kidneys, which means that your vet can assess the progression of the kidney disease.

How is it treated?

If there is an underlying cause to the CKD, and this is addressed early, then the progression of the kidney disease may be halted. If there is no underlying cause, then the aim of treatment is to support kidney function and the clinical signs associated with CKD. Cats with CKD should be monitored regularly by your vet to ensure that any changes to their CKD is diagnosed and managed as early as possible.

Diet

A diet tailored specifically to the kidneys is recommended to slow down the progression of the disease. When not functioning effectively, your cat's kidneys cannot effectively breakdown protein, they lose potassium, and can't remove phosphate as readily, all of which can cause further damage to the kidneys. Therefore, a 'Renal diet' is recommended, which contains low levels of high-quality proteins, low phosphate and higher levels of potassium. Renal diets also contain anti-oxidants to help support kidney function.

Water intake

Increasing fluid intake is recommended in cats with CKD. Feeding a wet food rather than a dry diet and adding extra water can aid this, as well as the use of multiple water bowls, flavoured water, and the regular changing of water to keep it fresh.

Phosphate binders

Phosphate binders in the form of a powder can be added to the cat's meal if a renal diet is still not enough to maintain normal phosphate levels. These work by binding the phosphate in the food, preventing absorption into the blood.

Potassium supplements

A potassium supplement, often in the form of a liquid, can be added to the cat's diet, in addition to a renal diet, if needed.

Reducing urine protein levels

A liquid medication is given to reduce protein loss in the urine in an attempt to slow down the progression of kidney disease.



Blood pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is commonly seen in cats with CKD, as the kidneys are involved in regulating blood pressure. Hypertension can cause further damage to the kidneys if left untreated. If this is present, your vet will recommend tablets to manage the high blood pressure and their blood pressure will be monitored regularly.

What does this mean for my cat?

Unfortunately, CKD is a progressive disease, which means that you will see a deterioration of your cat's condition over time. However, the progression varies between individual cats. Appropriate management of the disease can help to slow down the progression of CKD and increase the quality of life for your cat.



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If you are worried about your cat's health, or want to discuss treatment options, give us a call to make an appointment.