

CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE (CKD) IN ANIMALS

Chronic kidney disease is common in middle-aged and older pets, particularly cats. In animals with this disease, the kidneys slowly lose their ability to filter harmful waste materials out of the blood and to retain water in the body. As a result, waste products build up in the blood causing illness and other complications.

What is Chronic Kidney Disease?

In animals with chronic kidney disease, healthy kidney cells become damaged and unable to function properly. The kidneys are then unable to keep up with their job of removing harmful waste material from the blood and maintaining enough water in the body. Affected pets become dehydrated, urinate more and have to drink more in order to keep up with the loss of water into the urine. They may also vomit, eat less and seem lethargic.

What Causes Chronic Kidney Disease?

It is not always clear what causes CKD. Sometimes it can be due to an age-related decline in kidney function (this may have an inherited component). Illnesses affecting other body systems (e.g. heart disease, dental disease etc.) can also sometimes lead to kidney disease. Frequently it is not possible to identify the cause.

Symptoms of Chronic Kidney Disease

The common symptoms of CKD noted by owners at home are:

- Increased urination (amount and frequency)
- Increased thirst
- Decreased appetite
- Constipation
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Lethargy or tiredness

How is Chronic Kidney Disease diagnosed?

In pets who may be showing the signs seen above, your vet will likely recommend a blood test to check for evidence of kidney disease. In particular we usually look for elevations in urea and creatinine (which are usually filtered into the urine by the kidneys). We also often test the concentration of your pet's urine to confirm that changes in the blood parameters are specifically related to kidneys. We are also able to run SDMA tests which are good at detecting very early deterioration in kidney function.

We will usually repeat blood tests every 3 to 6 months to track any deterioration in kidney function.

What can you do for your pet?

Chronic kidney disease is a progressive condition, meaning that once it starts it will continue to worsen over time. Fortunately, progression of the disease can sometimes be slowed down with proper dietary management, certain medications and giving fluids (in hospital). The earlier treatment is started, the better your pet will feel.

Special 'renal' diets are designed to reduce the amount of waste products in the blood, which means the kidneys have less work to do filtering them out into the urine. These diets are usually readily eaten by pets, but if there is any

reluctance there are ways to encourage them to eat such as warming the food or adding low salt tuna juice or broths, or slowly introducing them by mixing them in with the normal food in increasing quantities. Make sure to avoid foods like onion as these are not good for your pet's kidneys and may put further strain on them. Table scraps should also be avoided.

Sometimes your vet may recommend starting a medication to assist in the management of CKD in your pet. This medication is designed to maximise the remaining kidney function your pet has, but is not always recommended in the early stages of disease.

It is essential for all pets to have access to plenty of fresh clean water at all times, however those with kidney disease may need extra fluid to help treat or prevent dehydration. If your pet needs more fluids than they can drink, we can show you how to give fluids at home.

Long term management of Chronic Kidney Disease

Although chronic kidney disease is not curable, many pets respond well to treatment, and it also helps them to feel a lot better. When the disease is caught early and managed appropriately, pets can sometimes live with it for years. Bringing your pet in for regular vet visits for any necessary tests and to monitor their weight is an important part of managing chronic kidney disease. In between visits, being aware of your pets' usual habits and behaviours can help to identify if things change (e.g. appetite, energy levels, thirst and urination habits).