



# Chronic Kidney Disease in Cats

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is a commonly diagnosed disorder in middle-aged and older cats. Unfortunately there is no cure, however, there are many things we can do to slow the progression and help your cat feel well for as long as possible.

## What do the kidneys do?

The kidneys filter blood, removing waste products from the body via the urine. They also help control the balance of salts and produce a hormone to stimulate red blood cell production to prevent anaemia.

## What are the signs of CKD?

Early signs of CKD are often very subtle, in fact you may simply believe your cat is starting to show their age. Weight loss is common, particularly from the back muscles, causing the spine to feel more prominent. Appetite may be reduced, although thirst and urination are often increased. Occasionally cats may vomit, have bad breath or appear weak and tired.

## What causes CKD?

Clinical signs of CKD rarely appear until at least 65-75% of the kidney tissue has been damaged. There are many different causes of CKD, including:

- General deterioration due to age
- Infection or cancer
- Previous injury or toxin exposure
- Genetic predisposition such as Polycystic Kidney Disease in Persian-type cats

## How is CKD diagnosed?

Basic diagnosis is usually made following a starved blood test and analysis of a urine sample. Your Vet may then check for:

- Urinary tract infection
- Excessive protein loss into the urine
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal kidney tissue by performing an ultrasound scan
- Other conditions which may also be present such as Hyperthyroidism



## How can I slow the progression of CKD in my cat?

Unfortunately there is no cure for CKD. Any medications prescribed for your cat may be required for the rest of their life. Specific treatments may depend on the cause of CKD, as well as the temperament of the cat and presence of other diseases.

Of all the treatments available for CKD, diet is one of the most beneficial, helping to significantly improve both quality and quantity of life. The kidneys are responsible for eliminating waste products from the body, many of which come from break-down of foods. Specialised diets have been formulated to lessen the load on the kidneys by having moderately restricted phosphorus and salt levels, alongside a high quality but regulated protein level to prevent further muscle loss.

## Introducing a new diet to your cat

Your cat may not find a low salt, restricted protein diet as tasty as their usual one so be prepared to waste a little at first. Any change in diet should be made gradually, and it is important to persevere for a few weeks before seeking alternatives. Many flavours are available, in biscuit, chunks in gravy or paté form so there is usually one to suit every cat. You may start by placing the new diet in a bowl next to the usual food, allowing your cat to investigate the new option. Eventually you can try mixing the new and original diets, before making the full swap.

Appetite can be variable in cats with CKD but it is important that they eat to prevent further weight loss. Although a kidney diet is recommended, if your cat will not eat it, an alternative should always be offered.

## What other treatments are there?

This depends on each individual case. Other treatments may include:

- Medication to prevent high blood pressure. If left untreated this can cause blindness at its most severe.
- A tablet to prevent the kidneys losing protein into the urine, which can exacerbate muscle loss.
- A paste to add to food to help bind phosphorus – this is particularly useful in cats that refuse to eat specialised renal diets.
- Potassium supplements – sometimes cats lose too much potassium into the urine, which can cause weakness.
- Multivitamin injections to help replace water soluble vitamins that are excreted in the urine.

## Once diagnosed with CKD, how long may a cat live for?

This depends very much on the cause of CKD and the severity of the disease. A cat diagnosed with CKD at the earliest stage may lead a normal life for many years – hence early detection and management is crucial.

**If you think your pet may be showing any signs of CKD, please contact your local branch for an appointment.**