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Chronic Kidney Disease

What is Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)?

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) describes the gradual loss of kidney function over time. The kidneys normally filter waste products out of the blood. The waste is then excreted, or released, in the urine. Cats with CKD have kidneys that are not functioning properly. So, the waste products accumulate in their bloodstream and they suffer from symptoms of this illness. CKD occurs over a period of time, and can be deadly for cats.

What Causes CKD?

The cause of CKD is usually difficult to determine. Damage to the nephron, the kidney unit that filters the blood, is usually irreversible and progressive. Many different diseases can cause Chronic Kidney Disease. If your veterinarian cannot determine a definite cause, it is called “idiopathic kidney disease.”

Some common causes of Chronic Kidney Disease are:

- Certain toxins, like lilies and antifreeze
- Genetic abnormalities
- High blood pressure
- Lack of blood supply leading to the kidneys
- Infections
- Cancer
- Immunologic diseases

Sometimes the cause of CKD can be specifically treated, but most of the time the changes in the kidneys are permanent. By partnering with your veterinarian, it may be possible to slow down the progression of CKD and achieve a good quality of life for your cat.

Signs & Symptoms

Cats with CKD typically do not show any signs of illness until the kidneys have lost two thirds of their functional ability. At that point, the following signs are often observed:

- Weight loss and thin body condition
- Increased thirst and more urine being produced in the litter box
- Diminished appetite
- Lethargy

Testing

- ◆ Annual or bi-annual check-ups are the best way for you to find out if your cat has early signs of CKD. Your cat's current weight is compared to previous weights. The veterinarian asks about your cat's appetite, urine output, and water consumption.
- ◆ Yearly blood and urine tests help your veterinarian determine if your cat has abnormal values that suggest CKD.
- ◆ A new test is now available that can help your veterinarian spot kidney disease sooner.
- ◆ Urine cultures help the veterinarian determine if they need to prescribe an antibiotics for an infection that may play a part in your cat's CKD.
- ◆ Your veterinarian measures your cat's blood pressure. This helps them identify and guard against problems such as vision loss and stroke.

Treatment and Management

- ◆ Dietary management may slow the progression of CKD. Although there is some controversy as to when dietary intervention should start and what diet to use. You and your veterinarian can determine if your cat needs a dietary change and which diet to use.
- ◆ Medications are available to treat problems such as low potassium levels and poor appetite.
- ◆ If your cat needs improved hydration, your veterinarian can teach you how to give supplemental fluids underneath the skin of your cat. This can help extend the duration and quality of life.
- ◆ Treating CKD is a partnership between you and your veterinarian.
- ◆ Regular evaluations help refine treatments and identify new problems early when they are easier to resolve.
- ◆ Although CKD cannot be cured, many cats with CKD live with good quality of life for an extended period of time, often years.

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