

## Disease Management

# Chronic Kidney Disease

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, wastes build up in the blood, causing illness and other complications. Although there is no cure, treatment can sometimes help slow the progression of chronic kidney disease and give your pet a more comfortable life.

### What Is Chronic Kidney Disease?

Chronic kidney disease is a condition in which healthy kidney cells become damaged and unable to function properly. As a result, the kidneys become unable to keep up with their job of removing harmful waste materials from the blood and maintaining enough water in the body. Affected pets become dehydrated,



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urinate more, and have to drink more to replace the water lost in the urine. They may also vomit, eat less, and seem tired because they feel ill from the waste materials that are not filtered out of the blood.

### What Causes It?

It's not always clear what causes chronic kidney disease. Sometimes it is associated with an age-related decrease in kidney function. Illnesses affecting other body systems (such as heart disease) can sometimes lead to kidney disease. Severe dental disease may even be a cause if it leads to an infection in the bloodstream. Often, however, the cause is not known.

### What Can I Do for My Pet?

Chronic kidney disease is a progressive condition, meaning that once it starts, it continues to worsen over time. Fortunately, the progression of chronic kidney disease can sometimes be slowed down with proper management, and the earlier treatment starts, the better your pet will feel. We may prescribe a spe-

### Don't Forget the TLC

- Groom your pet regularly. Pets with chronic kidney disease may not groom themselves as often.
- Make sure that your older pet can still get around. If stairs are difficult for your pet, a ramp may be a solution. A litterbox with lower sides may be helpful for cats.
- Provide warm, comfortable places for your pet to sleep.
- Try to reduce stress for your pet, and be aware that he or she may get tired easily.
- Give your pet plenty of love and affection.

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cial “renal” diet for your pet. Renal diets are designed to reduce the amount of waste products in the blood. If your pet doesn’t want to eat, you will need to encourage him or her. Warming food in the microwave, or adding flavor with low-salt tuna juice, chicken broth, or beef broth may help. Always make sure that anything you add does not contain onions, which are poisonous to dogs and cats, and do not feed your pet table scraps. If your pet still won’t eat, please call us.

Other ways of treating chronic kidney disease involve medication and giving fluids. It is essential for pets with chronic kidney disease to always have plenty of clean water to drink, but sometimes, they need extra fluids to help keep from getting dehydrated. If your pet needs more fluids than it can drink, we can teach you how to give fluids at home.

### Long-Term Management of Chronic Kidney Disease

Because there is no cure for chronic kidney disease, you will need to manage this condition for the rest of your pet’s life. When the disease is caught early and managed appropriately, pets can sometimes live with it for years. Pets generally feel better with treatment, so management is the best option for your pet.

Bringing your pet in for regular visits and testing is very important in managing chronic kidney disease. However, between visits, be aware of your pet’s usual habits and behaviors so that you notice if anything changes. Be sure to schedule an appointment if your pet shows any of the following signs of illness:

- Increased urination (amount and frequency)
- Increased thirst
- Decreased appetite
- Constipation
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Lethargy (unusual tiredness) or avoidance of other family members

Chronic kidney disease can be managed, and we are here to help you and your pet! Call us with any questions you may have about this condition or your pet’s care.

## Five Things You Should Do for Your Pet

Your first reactions to a diagnosis of chronic kidney disease for your pet might be fear, worry, and sadness about what is to come. However, there are things you can do to keep your pet enjoying a good quality of life. Although chronic kidney disease is not “curable,” many pets respond well to treatment. In addition to bringing your pet in for regular checkups, here are five important tips for caring for your pet:

- **Monitor your pet’s weight:** Progressive weight loss may indicate that your pet is not responding well to treatment. Checking your pet’s weight at home once a week (and keeping a notebook to track any changes) can provide useful information. If your pet is small enough to pick up, you can hold him or her while standing on a scale and then subtract your own weight from the combined weight. If you can’t weigh your pet at home, ask us about coming in periodically for “weigh-ins.”
- **Follow all medication instructions:** Follow all the instructions for your pet’s medications carefully. If you are not sure about an instruction, please call us. If your pet vomits or has problems with a medication, call us right away.
- **Avoid giving your pet human food:** If your pet refuses to eat, notify us right away.
- **Don’t forget about other health issues:** Dental health, parasite control, and other aspects of wellness management are still important for pets with chronic illnesses. Keep up with regular toothbrushing, heartworm preventive medication, and application of flea and tick control products.
- **Don’t be afraid to ask questions:** Your veterinary health care team is here to help you and your pet through this challenging time in your lives. Don’t be afraid to call with any questions or concerns!