

Chronic Kidney Failure

Chronic kidney failure is a progressive and irreversible disease that affects many of our canine and feline companions in their older years. Most of the time a cause is not found but treatment plans often remain the same. Signs of chronic kidney failure include but are not limited to: increased thirst, increased urinations, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, and dehydration. These signs are often seen with other diseases, so a proper diagnosis needs to be made by a veterinarian using urine and bloodwork results. If chronic kidney failure is present, we will see an inability of the kidneys to concentrate the urine, which leads to the increased thirst and urinations. We will also find an increase in kidney parameters, BUN and creatinine, on bloodwork. These are toxins produced by the body that build up when the kidneys can no longer eliminate them. Often we can also see mild anemia (low red blood cell count), high phosphorus and calcium levels and low potassium levels.

Even though kidney failure is progressive and irreversible, it definitely doesn't mean that there is nothing that can be done. There are many treatments available to slow the progression of the disease and improve clinical signs and your pet's quality of life. The first and most important treatment is to get your pet eating one of the few prescription kidney diets (such as Hill's Science Diet Prescription K/D, Royal Canin Renal LP or Modified formulas, Purina Prescription NF, etc.) . These diets are low in protein and phosphorus and high in omega 3 polyunsaturated fatty acids to help minimize the chances and severity of renal failure crises and lengthen your pet's remaining lifespan. These diets are not available over the counter, but must be purchased through a veterinary clinic. If the phosphorus level remains elevated in spite of the use of a renal diet, an oral phosphate binder, such as Maalox, can be used to prevent intestinal absorption of phosphorus. Inappetence, nausea, and vomiting can be improved with antacids, such as Pepcid AC. A new oral product, Azodyl, provides the body with bacteria that breakdown the toxins and excrete them in the feces, acting as an intestinal form of dialysis. If an abnormal amount of protein is being lost in the urine or high blood pressure is documented, drugs such as Enalapril or Amlodipine, can be added to spare the kidneys the damage resulting from these changes. Potassium can be supplemented if found to be low due to excessive loss from the kidneys. Many times chronic dehydration occurs because of the excessive amounts of water and electrolytes lost in the urine. Owners can be taught how to give their pet fluids under the skin to help maintain hydration and flush the body of the toxins. There are many other options and medications not mentioned that can be used depending on the degree of kidney failure found. These are just some of the most common treatments used.

An individualized treatment plan needs to be made by a veterinarian for each pet seen and often these plans need changed as the kidney failure progresses. Frequent examinations and monitoring of bloodwork, blood pressure and urine is required to best treat a pet with kidney failure, with the frequency dependent on the degree of kidney failure evident. The diagnosis of kidney failure is no longer an eminent death sentence for your pet. With some of these treatments mentioned, pets can live longer, happier, and healthier lives.