



Chronic Kidney Disease in Your Cat

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), also known as Chronic Renal Failure (CRF), is one of the most common illnesses in older cats. It is a progressive condition where the kidneys gradually lose their ability to function over a period of months or years.

❤️ What Do the Kidneys Do?

Your cat's kidneys are vital organs that perform many essential tasks, including:

- **Filtering Waste:** Removing waste products and toxins from the blood (like urea and creatinine).
- **Balancing Fluids:** Controlling the body's water and salt levels.
- **Regulating Blood Pressure:** Helping to maintain a healthy blood pressure.
- **Producing Hormones:** Creating hormones necessary for red blood cell production (to prevent anemia).

❓ Why Does CKD Happen? (Causes)

For the majority of cats, the exact initial cause of CKD is **not known**. It is often considered a combination of factors, including:

- **Aging:** CKD is most commonly seen in middle-aged to older cats. It is believed to be a gradual loss of kidney function over a lifetime, similar to the natural aging process in humans.
- **Hereditary Conditions:** Some breeds, like Persians, may be predisposed to diseases like Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD).
- **Chronic Infections:** Long-term infections in the urinary system (like pyelonephritis) can damage kidney tissue over time.
- **Previous Injuries:** Unresolved episodes of acute kidney injury (from toxins, trauma, or severe illness) can lead to permanent damage and eventual CKD.
- **Other Diseases:** Conditions like high blood pressure (hypertension) or certain cancers can also damage the kidneys.

When CKD occurs, the filtering units in the kidneys (nephrons) become permanently damaged, leading to a build-up of waste products and loss of vital nutrients.



Is CKD Reversible?

No, CKD is an irreversible and progressive disease.

The damage to the kidney tissue that causes CKD is permanent. The term "chronic" means it is a long-lasting condition that gets worse over time.

- **The Goal of Treatment:** The purpose of treatment is **not to cure** the disease, but to **slow its progression**, manage the symptoms, and preserve your cat's quality of life for as long as possible.
- **Early Detection is Key:** Because the kidney has a large reserve capacity, symptoms often don't appear until **over 75%** of kidney function is lost. This is why regular veterinary check-ups and screening blood/urine tests, especially for older cats, are so important for early intervention.



Your Role in Management

You are your cat's best advocate. Closely monitor your cat for changes in **thirst/urination, appetite, and weight**. Be consistent with administering prescribed diets and medications. **Good management can allow cats with CKD to maintain a good quality of life for months to years.**

Living with CKD: What to Watch For

As a caregiver, you might notice subtle shifts that indicate the disease is progressing or needs a treatment adjustment:

- "The Crash": Even stable cats can have "acute-on-chronic" episodes (a sudden worsening often triggered by a minor infection or dehydration). These require immediate vet care.
- Hypertension (High Blood Pressure): Up to 60% of cats with CKD develop high blood pressure. If left untreated, it can cause sudden blindness or strokes.
- Muscle Wasting: Even if a cat is eating, they may lose muscle mass over their spine and hips. This is a sign that the body is struggling to process protein correctly.



How is CKD Typically Treated?

Treatment is focused on supporting the remaining healthy kidney function and mitigating the effects of toxin build-up. Your veterinarian will tailor a plan based on your cat's specific stage of the disease (often using the IRIS staging system).

Treatment Area	Specific Management	Why It's Needed
Dietary Management	Prescription Renal Diet (The most proven way to slow progression!)	These diets are typically restricted in phosphorus (the most critical factor) and contain controlled, high-quality protein and increased omega-3 fatty acids to help slow down the disease.
Hydration	Encouraging Water Intake (water fountains, wet food, multiple water bowls) and sometimes Subcutaneous (Sub-Q) Fluid Therapy	Cats with CKD produce large amounts of dilute urine and can easily become dehydrated. Maintaining hydration is essential for kidney support.
Medication/Supplements	Phosphate Binders (given with food), Blood Pressure Medication , Potassium Supplements , Anti-nausea/Appetite Stimulants	These medications manage complications like high phosphorus levels, high blood pressure (hypertension), low potassium, and poor appetite/nausea caused by the toxin build-up.
Monitoring	Regular Vet Check-ups, Blood Tests, and Urine Tests (every 1-6 months, depending on the stage)	CKD is progressive, so treatment needs to be adjusted as the disease changes. Frequent monitoring allows your vet to intervene before symptoms become severe.



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