

Kidney or renal disease



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDE 6



The kidneys are responsible for filtering waste products out of the blood to form urine. Disease of the kidneys is one of the most common problems affecting middle-aged and older cats. Unfortunately, damage to the kidneys is irreversible and they tend to deteriorate over a period of time. However, with the help of various treatments, affected cats can often maintain a good quality of life for several months or years.

Kidney disease is broadly divided into two types:

Chronic kidney disease

This is the most common type and refers to a gradual-onset, long-term disease of the kidneys. The damage caused is usually due to the natural ageing process and is often seen in cats over seven years of age. Other factors which may also have an influence on this disease are inherited defects – especially in certain breeds of pedigree cats – infections, viral diseases, cancerous growths and urinary stones.

Acute kidney disease

This refers to sudden damage to the kidney or kidneys and is usually as a result of trauma, poisoning, infections or blockages caused by lower urinary tract disease. Signs can be sudden and severe and, unless urgent treatment is given, the condition can rapidly become fatal. In spite of treatment, a cat with acute kidney disease may then go on to suffer from chronic kidney disease.

What happens if the kidneys don't work properly?

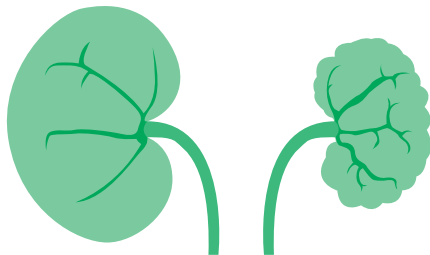
If the kidneys are not working properly, it can have a number of effects on the cat, such as:

- a build-up of waste toxins that damage other body tissues
- high blood pressure
- loss of essential minerals and excess fluid in the urine
- anaemia

What are the signs of kidney disease?

Most cats do not show signs of chronic kidney disease until 75 per cent of the kidneys have been damaged. Signs can vary between individuals but the most common ones are:

- increased thirst
- passing more urine
- poor appetite
- weight loss
- poor coat condition
- vomiting
- lethargy
- depression
- bad breath



How is it diagnosed?

Your vet will test your cat's blood and urine for high levels of waste products that should normally be kept within safe levels by healthy kidneys.

Many vets will try to diagnose kidney disease in its early stages, before clinical signs develop, by offering cat owners the option of urine and blood tests for their older cats at routine check-ups or vaccinations. Early diagnosis and treatment may significantly extend an affected cat's life expectancy.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the stage of kidney failure your cat has, the signs shown and impact of the condition on other body systems. Treatment may include:

Fluid therapy

If your cat becomes very dehydrated, the vet may administer extra fluids to help replace lost salts and water.

Medication

Your cat may be prescribed medication such as:

- Long-term oral medication to control protein loss in the urine and/or control high blood pressure as both will further damage your cat's kidneys
- medication for specific problems associated with kidney disease, such as vomiting
- long-acting injections to stimulate appetite and slow weight loss

Diet

Your vet may prescribe a specific diet that limits further kidney damage and reduces the workload on your cat's kidneys by decreasing production of waste products in the blood.

Dietary management is the single most important factor in the management of renal disease in cats, to improve quality of life and improve life expectancy. Of particular importance is restricting the level of phosphate intake, or using a supplement to bind phosphate and restrict its absorption. Encouraging fluid intake is also beneficial and for tips on how to do this, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Feeding and obesity*.

Following this initial treatment for renal disease, your cat is likely to be prescribed a diet for the rest of their life and they may also need medication. You will have to carefully observe your cat for any changes in their eating, drinking and urinating. Regular check-ups with your vet and further blood and urine tests will be beneficial to monitor progression of the disease.

What does the future hold?

Depending on the severity of the kidney damage, with regular monitoring, correct medication and treatment, many cats with kidney disease can go on to lead long and happy lives. Sadly, however, the condition will deteriorate over time.

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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