



Chronic kidney disease in cats: explained

Understanding Chronic Kidney Disease in Cats

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CKD cannot usually be cured, but it can often be managed. Early diagnosis, the right diet, regular monitoring, and good communication with your veterinarian can help many cats enjoy a good quality of life for years.

What is chronic kidney disease?

The kidneys remove waste from the blood, balance water and minerals, help control blood pressure, and support red blood cell production. In chronic kidney disease (CKD), kidney function slowly decreases over time. CKD is especially common in older cats, although younger cats can also be affected. Cats with CKD do not all follow the same course. Some remain stable for a long time. Others progress more quickly. Your cat's stage, appetite, weight, blood pressure, urine results, and response to treatment all help guide the care plan.

Signs you may notice at home

- Drinking more water or making larger urine clumps
- Weight loss or loss of muscle
- Eating less, becoming picky, or walking away from food
- Vomiting, nausea, lip licking, or drooling
- Low energy, weakness, or hiding more than usual
- A dull coat, dehydration, or bad breath

Important: Early CKD may cause few or no obvious signs. Routine blood and urine testing can find changes before a cat looks sick.

How CKD is diagnosed

No single test gives the whole answer. Your veterinarian looks at several findings together and may repeat tests after your cat is well hydrated and medically stable.

Blood tests

Creatinine, BUN, and SDMA help estimate how well the kidneys are filtering waste. These values can also be affected by hydration, muscle mass, diet, and other illnesses.

Urinalysis

The urine is checked to see how well the kidneys concentrate it and to look for blood, infection, crystals, glucose, and other changes.

Urine protein test



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A urine protein-to-creatinine ratio, often called a UPC, helps determine whether the kidneys are leaking too much protein.

Blood pressure

High blood pressure can be caused by CKD and can also damage the kidneys, eyes, brain, and heart.

Additional testing

A urine culture, ultrasound, or X-rays may be recommended to look for infection, stones, obstruction, cancer, or other problems that can affect the kidneys.

What does the CKD stage mean?

After CKD is confirmed, veterinarians commonly use the International Renal Interest Society (IRIS) staging system. Staging helps match treatment and monitoring to the severity of the disease. It is based on creatinine and SDMA measured in a stable, hydrated cat, then refined using urine protein and blood pressure.

Stage	Creatinine* General level	What it often means
1	<1.6 mg/dL	Early. Other evidence of kidney disease is present even though creatinine may still be normal.
2	1.6-2.8 mg/dL	Mild. Signs may be absent or mild. Diet and early treatment can be especially valuable.
3	2.9-5.0 mg/dL	Moderate. Appetite, hydration, weight, phosphorus, blood pressure, and nausea often need closer attention.
4	>5.0 mg/dL	Severe. The risk of poor appetite, weight loss, dehydration, anemia, and uremic illness is higher.

*Creatinine ranges are general feline IRIS ranges. A cat should not be staged from one number alone.

How CKD is treated

Treatment is tailored to the individual cat. The goals are to slow kidney damage when possible, maintain hydration and body weight, and protect quality of life.

Diet is one of the most important treatments

Prescription kidney diets limit phosphorus, provide controlled amounts of high-quality protein, and adjust other nutrients important in CKD. Canned food also adds water. These diets are commonly started in stage 2 and are especially important in stages 3 and 4. However, your cat must eat enough calories. A perfect diet does not help if your cat refuses it or loses weight. Contact your veterinarian if the prescription food is refused. A slower transition, another renal formula, an appropriate non-prescription alternative, or treatment for nausea may be needed.

Other treatments may include:

- Support hydration with canned food, added water, fountains, or fluids under the skin when



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prescribed.

- Treat nausea, vomiting, constipation, or poor appetite.
- Control high blood pressure, excess urine protein, and abnormal phosphorus.
- Correct low potassium, anemia, infection, or other problems when present.

Monitoring and recheck visits

CKD changes over time, so rechecks are part of treatment. Stable cats may be checked every few months; cats with later-stage disease, poor appetite, or recent treatment changes may need more frequent visits. Rechecks may include weight, muscle condition, hydration, blood pressure, blood and urine tests, appetite, medications, and quality of life.

When to call your veterinarian promptly

- Stops eating or eats much less than usual
- Vomits repeatedly or cannot keep water down
- Becomes very weak, collapses, seems confused, or suddenly cannot see
- Cannot urinate, strains to urinate, or produces very little urine
- Loses weight or has a major change in thirst or urination

The most effective CKD plan is one your cat can tolerate and your family can carry out. Report changes early. This handout provides general education and does not replace an examination or an individualized treatment plan.