Chronic Kidney Disease in Cats

Chronic kidney disease is one of the most common and manageable conditions in older cats. With early detection and comprehensive treatment, many cats can live comfortably for years after diagnosis. Understanding CKD empowers cat owners and veterinary teams to provide compassionate, effective care that extends both the quality and duration of their feline companions' lives.

Recognizing the Symptoms

Early Warning Signs

Early signs of CKD are often subtle and easily overlooked. Cats may drink more water than usual and urinate more frequently. Weight loss can occur gradually, along with decreased appetite and general lethargy. Because cats are masters at hiding illness, these changes may seem minor at first.

Progressive Indicators

As the disease advances, more obvious symptoms emerge: vomiting becomes more frequent, bad breath develops from uremic toxins building up in the bloodstream, and coat quality deteriorates. These signs typically appear late in the disease process, which is why early diagnostic screening is essential—especially for cats over seven years of age.

Comprehensive Diagnostic Testing

Accurate diagnosis begins with thorough testing. Modern diagnostics have revolutionized our ability to detect kidney disease earlier, allowing for more effective intervention before significant damage occurs.

Blood Chemistry

Elevated **BUN** and **creatinine** remain foundational markers. **SDMA** (symmetric dimethylarginine) rises earlier in CKD than creatinine, detecting dysfunction before 75% of kidney tissue is lost.

Urinalysis

Persistently **dilute urine** (low specific gravity) indicates impaired concentrating ability. **Proteinuria** reflects glomerular damage and helps stage disease severity.

Blood Pressure

Hypertension both causes and results from CKD. Routine monitoring prevents secondary organ damage to eyes, heart, and brain.

Dental Assessment

Chronic dental infections and oral inflammation contribute to systemic inflammation and kidney stress. Addressing periodontal disease is essential.

In selected cases, **abdominal ultrasound** provides valuable information about kidney size, structure, and concurrent issues like stones or cysts that may influence treatment decisions.

Foundation of Treatment

Treatment focuses on slowing disease progression, managing symptoms, and maintaining quality of life through a multi-faceted approach. Each element works synergistically to protect remaining kidney function.

1

Optimize Hydration

Encourage increased water intake through wet food, multiple water sources, and water fountains. When oral intake is insufficient, subcutaneous fluid therapy provides essential hydration and helps flush toxins.

2

Control Phosphorus

Phosphate binders administered with meals limit dietary phosphorus absorption. Reducing phosphorus levels slows the progression of kidney damage and prevents secondary hyperparathyroidism.

3

Manage Blood Pressure

Systemic hypertension accelerates kidney deterioration. **Amlodipine**, a calcium channel blocker, effectively controls blood pressure and protects target organs including kidneys, eyes, and heart.

4

Address Proteinuria

ACE inhibitors or **ARBs** reduce protein loss through damaged glomeruli, preserving remaining kidney function and improving long-term outcomes.

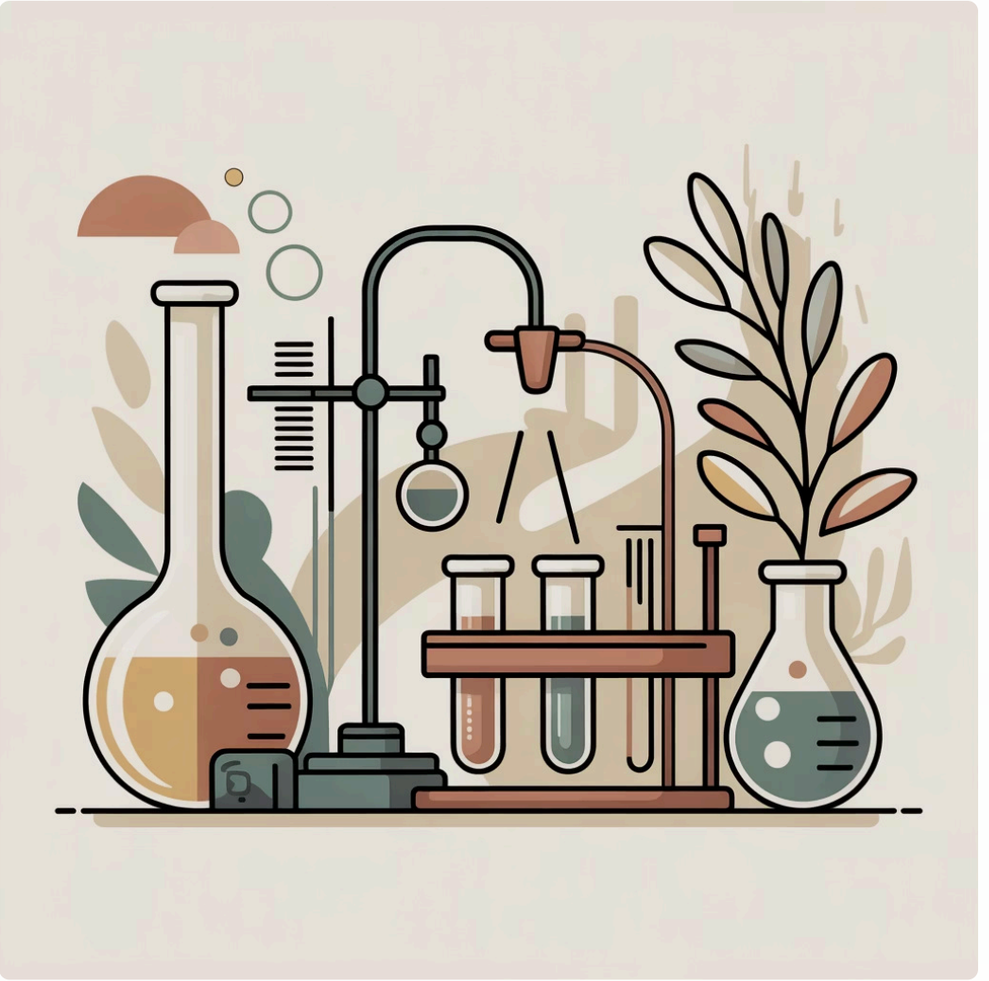
5

Prioritize Dental Health

Regular dental cleanings and treatment of gingivitis or tooth resorption reduce systemic inflammation and infection burden, supporting overall kidney health.

Emerging Therapeutic Options

Recent scientific advances are transforming CKD management, offering new hope for extending and improving the lives of affected cats. These innovative treatments complement traditional therapies and represent exciting progress in feline nephrology.



Rapamycin

Known for anti-aging properties, this medication shows promise in enhancing kidney cell function and reducing fibrosis. Ongoing studies demonstrate encouraging preliminary results for slowing CKD progression.

Varenzin™-CA1

This FDA-approved medication (molidustat) stimulates natural erythropoietin production, effectively treating CKD-related anemia without human-derived hormone injections. It represents a significant advancement in managing secondary complications.

These developments, combined with comprehensive traditional management strategies, are helping veterinarians achieve better outcomes and extend quality life for CKD patients.

Nutritional Therapy: The Cornerstone of Care

Dietary management remains one of the most powerful tools in CKD treatment. The right nutrition can significantly slow disease progression while maintaining body condition and quality of life.

Quality Protein

Cats need **high-quality protein** in **controlled amounts**—not extreme restriction. Adequate protein maintains lean muscle mass and supports immune function, preventing malnutrition.

Essential Nutrients

Therapeutic diets should be **low in phosphorus and sodium**, supplemented with **omega-3 fatty acids** for anti-inflammatory renal protection and cardiovascular support.

Palatability Matters

Maintaining calorie intake is more important than perfect diet adherence. If a cat refuses prescription food, work with your veterinarian to find acceptable alternatives that still support kidney health.

Remember: A cat that eats well maintains better body condition, muscle mass, and quality of life. Never force strict dietary restrictions if they lead to food refusal or weight loss.

Long-Term Monitoring and Ongoing Care

CKD is a dynamic disease requiring consistent vigilance. Regular monitoring allows early detection of changes and timely treatment adjustments, maximizing your cat's comfort and longevity.

Every 3-6 Months

Recheck bloodwork (**SDMA, BUN, creatinine**), urinalysis, and blood pressure to track disease stability or progression

1

2

Monitor at Home

Watch for weight loss, muscle wasting, changes in appetite, water intake, and litter box habits

Adjust Treatment

Modify medications, fluids, and diet based on monitoring results and clinical signs

3

4

Maintain Quality of Life

Focus on comfort, nutrition, and managing symptoms throughout the disease journey

The Path Forward

With attentive care, CKD can often be managed for years. Many cats live long, happy lives when their caregivers stay proactive with dental health, blood pressure monitoring, hydration support, and nutritional management. Early detection and consistent follow-up make the biggest difference—helping your cat enjoy both quality and quantity of life despite a CKD diagnosis.