

Ask the Vet



Dr. Julie Dudak was raised in the Raleigh/Durham area where she started working in the veterinary field at the age of 14. She graduated from NC State University with her Bachelor's degree in Zoology. She then moved to Michigan where she earned her Master's degree in Biology with a Physiology concentration. After receiving her Master's degree, she worked as a guest lecturer at Eastern Michigan University while continuing to work

as a veterinary assistant. She earned her veterinary degree from Colorado State University. Following graduation, she pursued advanced training by completing an internship at Carolina Veterinary Specialists in Greensboro. Since then, she has been in private practice as a small animal clinician. Dr. Dudak has a special interest in geriatric and preventative medicine, as well as a strong focus on the management of acute and chronic pain. She also enjoys soft tissue surgery. In her free time, Dr. Dudak enjoys running, cycling and being outdoors. She shares her home with her boyfriend (who is a veterinarian in Greensboro), her two goofy Great Danes (Frank and Cairo) and three wonderful cats (Myra Jean, Kylie and Koko).

Chronic Kidney Disease

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) or chronic renal failure (CRF) is one of the most common diseases affecting middle to older age pets, particularly cats. The causes of CKD vary, but some of the more common causes include degeneration (i.e., aging changes), infection, inflammation, toxins and trauma. Below are some of the most common concerns and questions people ask, or should be asking, about kidney disease and their pets:

What are some of the signs that I may notice in my pet? The most common signs people notice are increased thirst and urination (they seem to be "filling the water bowl more frequently, scooping the box more often, etc."), lethargy, sleeping more, decreased appetite or increased pickiness (e.g., "he/she will lick the gravy off their food" or "they'll eat their treats but not their food"), vomiting, bad breath and weight loss.

How is renal or kidney disease diagnosed? Renal and kidney disease may be diagnosed by evaluation of blood and urine. Unfortunately, by the time most people notice something is wrong with their pet, there has already been a great degree of damage done to the kidneys. The first thing that is detectable is an inability to concentrate urine. This does not occur until 2/3 of kidney function is gone. Blood values do not change until there is 3/4 loss of function. This is one of the many reasons your veterinarian likely recommends yearly, and even twice yearly, evaluation of your pet's blood AND urine.

What are some of the changes that occur with CKD? Loss of kidney function can lead to a variety of changes within the body. These include, but are not limited to, acid/base imbalance, potassium depletion (which leads to muscle weakness and lethargy), high phosphorous, anemia, increased gastric acid production (which helps contribute to nausea and vomiting) and high blood pressure.

Is there anything that can be done to treat or cure my pet if they develop kidney disease? Unlike the liver, once damaged, the kidneys will never regain full function. However, there are a multitude of treatments and modifications that can be made to slow the progression of the disease. Many patients with CKD can live full and happy lives. Treatment will vary depending on the stage of disease. The first step for all patients with CKD is a change in diet. Renal, or kidney, specific diets have a modified amount of protein, thus putting less "strain" on the kidneys, higher amounts of potassium and

less phosphorous to counteract the effects that occur with impaired kidney function. When diet alone is not enough to control electrolyte abnormalities, patients will be placed on potassium supplements and medications to bind excess phosphorous (these are generally well accepted when mixed in wet food). Antacids, such as Pepcid, anti-nausea medications, appetite stimulants, essential fatty acids, blood pressure medications and fluids given under the skin at home are also useful tools in treating patients with progressing kidney disease. Patients in end-stage kidney disease, or kidney failure, are often anemic. This anemia is the result of the kidney's inability to produce the hormone erythropoietin. This hormone stimulates the release of red blood cells from the bone marrow. There is a synthetic hormone available that may be used to help stimulate the bone marrow for some of the more advanced cases of kidney disease.

How often should my CKD pet be seen by my veterinarian? This often depends on how well your pet is responding to the recommended therapies. For a stable CKD pet, it is recommended they be seen by their veterinarian every 3-6 months. It is not only important to monitor blood values, but also blood pressure and urine. Pets with CKD are more prone to developing urinary tract infections. Unfortunately, since their urine is often very dilute, periodic urine cultures may be necessary to fully rule out an infection.

While it is disappointing and frightening to find out your beloved pet has kidney disease, it is important to remember that early detection is the first step at slowing the progression of this disease. Many seemingly healthy and happy pets may be suffering from kidney disease, but without routine blood and urine analysis, owners and veterinarians have no idea which pets are being affected. Remember, by the time a patient is exhibiting signs of kidney disease, they have already lost at least 2/3 of their kidney function. Kidney disease is often a very manageable disease, but only if you and your veterinarian know it exists in your pet. Be proactive, have your pet's blood and urine tested regularly.

See us for the best in flea and heartworm prevention.

CAT CLINIC
of Greensboro

Elizabeth Brumback Eilers, DVM
Jennifer Mercier, DVM
Julie Dudak, DVM

- Medicine, laser surgery & dentistry
- Laser pain therapy
- Complete health care facilities
- Behavioral consultations
- Boarding in kitty condos
- Preventive health programs

545-3390 | 2449 Battleground Avenue
www.catclinicofgreensboro.com