

You can help cat with CRF feel better

Dear Doctors,
My 12-year-old Siamese cat has been losing weight, drinking a lot of water, urinating a lot of pale urine, sleeping most of the time and picking at her food. She has also been throwing up every other day.

My veterinarian did a lot of tests and said she is suffering from chronic kidney failure. Is there anything I can do to make her more comfortable and help her live longer?

We are sorry to hear that your cat has chronic renal (kidney) failure (CRF).

Unfortunately, many other cat owners share your experience. Chronic renal failure is most often found in geriatric cats, but cats of any age can be affected.

We suspect that much of your cat's discomfort arises because her kidneys cannot function effectively.

The kidneys help remove waste products, such as creatinine and urea, from the body. If the kidneys don't work well, these waste products build up in the bloodstream.

Very high creatinine and urea levels may make your cat feel nauseous and weak, and cause her to lose interest in eating. When kidney blood values are elevated and your cat shows signs that she doesn't feel well, she is considered to have uremia.

Yes, there are things you can do to help your cat feel better and, it is hoped, live longer. However, you should keep in mind that chronic renal failure is considered irreversible and is usually progressive. Your veterinarian should discuss treatment options with you.

If your cat feels very ill and has high levels of waste products (creatinine and urea) in her blood, your veterinarian may suggest that your cat be hospitalized and placed on intravenous fluids. Fluid administration helps reverse dehydration and lower the levels of the blood toxins.

You can also supplement your cat's fluid level by injecting fluid under her skin (subcutaneously) at home. When



Ask the vets
Dr. Michael & Tracy Jaffe

subcutaneous fluids are administered on a regular basis they help prevent the creatinine and urea from building up in the bloodstream. Your veterinarian can demonstrate the procedure involved.

FOOD

Cats with renal failure often don't feel well and therefore have little interest in food.

Since your cat has a poor appetite, warm the food to make it smell more appealing. You can also make the food more appetizing if you mix it with low-sodium meat or fish broth or some meat baby food.

If all else fails, you can try a prescription oral medication, cyproheptadine, to help stimulate her appetite.

We recommend that animals with chronic renal failure be offered a special diet.

Prescription diets for animals with kidney failure are available from your veterinarian. These diets are lower in sodium, protein and phosphorus and may not be as palatable as regular cat food. If your cat doesn't like the prescription diet, offer her a different food.

The rule with animals with renal failure is get them to eat whatever you can. It is important that she eat enough calories to keep her from losing additional weight. It is also crucial that your cat drinks plenty of water so she doesn't become dehydrated.

LEVELS

Sometimes animals with kidney failure have excessively high blood phosphorus levels. Your veterinarian may recommend your cat be given intravenous fluids until the levels return to normal.

If your cat's phosphorus levels

are only slightly to moderately above normal, your veterinarian may simply want you to give her a medication with her meals, such as aluminum hydroxide, to bind the phosphorus.

The phosphorus binder helps keep her phosphorus level from climbing too high. Phosphorus-binding medications are available in liquid and tablet form, sold over the counter, and only effective if your cat is eating.

Cats with kidney disease may have subnormal levels of potassium and this may cause weakness. Potassium can be supplemented orally with a tablet, gel or powder. If your cat receives intravenous or subcutaneous fluids, extra potassium can be added to the fluids.

Many cats with renal failure have high blood pressure. Diets high in sodium may raise your cat's blood pressure.

Prescription kidney diets are lower in sodium to help keep the blood pressure normal. If your cat's blood pressure is very high, she may need oral medication to lower her blood pressure.

ANEMIA

If your cat has less energy than usual, she may be anemic. Anemia, which is when your cat has a subnormal number of red blood cells, is relatively common in animals with chronic renal failure.

Your veterinarian should monitor your cat's red blood cell count. If the anemia is getting significantly worse, your cat may be given a series of injections of erythropoietin to help her body produce more red blood cells. If your cat is severely anemic, a blood transfusion may be required.

You mention that your cat throws up frequently. This may be because her blood urea and creatinine levels are too high and her kidneys can't help rid her body of excess acid. This causes her to feel queasy and may result in the formation of stomach ulcers.

You may relieve her upset stomach if you give her a very dilute liquid suspension of baking soda or an antihistamine, such as famotidine. Most cats don't like the taste of the baking soda solution so you don't recommend it very often. You should discuss any medications with your veterinarian before you administer them to your pet.

A small percentage of cats with kidney failure are candidates for hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, or kidney transplantation. These treatments are available at only a few specialty hospitals and are often cost-prohibitive.

Good luck caring for your kitty. We hope that we've given you suggestions on topics to discuss with your veterinarian regarding the treatment of chronic renal failure.

Send questions to be addressed in this column by mail to care of Mary Klemic, At Home Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham MI 48009. Or e-mail askthetvets@juno.com.

Show offers ideas to get home in shape.

The 10th annual Fall Remodeling Show[®] will be open Friday-Sunday, Oct. 11-13, at the Novi Expo Center, sponsored by the non-profit Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan (BIA).

The Novi Expo Center is at 1-96 and Novi Road. Show hours are noon to 9 p.m. Oct. 11, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Oct. 12, and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Oct. 13.

Admission is \$6 for adults, \$2 for seniors, free for ages 12 and under. Parking is available at the center for a fee.

For more information, visit www.builders.org or call (248) 862-1019.

A special show highlight will be Mad Dog and Merrill, the hilarious grilling buddies. The duo will offer professional tips and demonstrate cooking everything for the holiday on the grill, from hors d'oeuvres to grilled desserts as seen on CBS and ESPN. Additional show features will include Cleaners Community Food Bank display of CANstruction[®], sculptural art created from canned and packaged food, perennial plants for sale direct from greenhouses and growers, and

DTE Energy's Arcs and Sparks presentations to caution people about electrical safety and the need to play it safe around power lines.

Among other highlights will be live radio broadcasts of WR's Home Improvement Show Murray Gula and The Gardening Show Dean Krauskopf. Showcases of Distinctive Homes, sponsored by BIA, Standard Federal Bank and The Detroit News and Detroit Free Press Classified Marketplace, which offers a free plan book featuring a pictorial display of new homes.

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