

## Chronic renal failure, a common problem in our pets

**Chronic** means long term. **Renal** means kidney. **Failure** means inability to perform a task adequately.

Chronic renal failure, also called **chronic kidney failure**, refers to the situation where the kidneys have not been able to perform at least one of their many tasks adequately for some time (months to years). Many cases can be treated and can look forward to months of quality life. The term renal failure implies that a condition called azotemia is present. This is the condition where toxins have built up in the bloodstream but does not necessarily mean the patient is experiencing reduced life quality as a result of these abnormal chemicals.

The term **uremia** means that the patient is experiencing uremic poisoning. In other words, not only is the chemistry abnormal but the patient is feeling the effects of the toxic build up. Our goal in treatment is to prevent, postpone, or resolve uremia. Resolving azotemia may not be realistic. In most cases, by the time the diagnosis of kidney failure has been made, the initial disease that started the kidneys on their path to failure is long gone, leaving a progressive loss of function to march unrelentingly onward.

Our goal is to stop that march, and get to a stage where the patient does not feel the consequences of the disease. We cannot make failed kidneys become normal again, but we may be able to re-balance our patient's metabolism so that he or she feels as though we did. What makes a case hopeless or hopeful depends on the patient's ability to respond to therapy nearly as much as it depends on the stage at which the condition is discovered. Many people have no idea what our kidneys do for us beyond that they have something to do with urine production.

In fact, the kidneys are involved in conservation of water, stimulating red blood cell production, regulating blood pressure, balancing salts, activating Vitamin D, and more. Any of these functions may be failing in the renal failure patient. The kidneys remove toxic wastes from our bodies and when these substances cannot be adequately removed, we develop excess thirst, nausea, pain, weakness, appetite loss, intestinal bleeding, even seizures.

Our goal in early stage patients is to postpone or even fully prevent the development of uremia. Our goal in later stage patients is to resolve the uremia and bring the patient back to an earlier stage of disease. So obviously prevention is worth a ton of cure in renal disease.

How can we reduce the chance of chronic renal failure?

- Prevent infection, especially dental disease and in cats, fight abscesses
- Lifelong feed a good quality diet
- Encourage water intake, especially in cats

We are always here to advise you on these issues, and any other aspect of pet care.

Kind Regards,  
Scott and Chris