

The Real Deal: Managing Kidney Disease

Chronic renal failure, if caught early, can be managed through careful attention to a cat's lifestyle.

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A New Method of Early Detection No one is sure what triggers the onset of feline renal failure. Once the process begins, however, it only gets progressively worse. Infections, inflammation, trauma, genetic factors and immune disorders have all been implicated in triggering the onset of renal failure. However, the inciting cause usually goes undetected.

By the time the dysfunction is discovered, the damage has been done. At that point, even a biopsy is unlikely to reveal the inciting cause. It would be ideal if there were an accurate, convenient and affordable way to detect renal disturbance at a much earlier point, because this would allow earlier intervention, increasing our ability to alter disease progression.

The kidneys selectively filter the blood. Albumin is an important protein that the kidneys normally do not let pass through the filter. However, when the kidneys are impaired, small amounts of albumin escape through the filter and appear in the urine.

Microalbuminuria (small amounts of albumin in the urine) has been shown to be an accurate predictor of impending renal disease. The ERD Healthscreen Urine Test, now available for cats, is a simple test that requires a small amount of urine. The test is performed in a clinic, with results available in less than 10 minutes.

A positive test (i.e. albumin in the urine) indicates that something is wrong with the kidneys and a search should be undertaken to detect possible causes for microalbuminuria. High blood pressure, dental disease, chronic skin infections and inflammatory bowel disease are a few common conditions that could lead to kidney inflammation and microalbuminuria.

If a medical condition is identified, it should be treated, and the ERD test repeated four weeks later. A normal result four weeks later suggests that the kidneys are no longer being irritated.

By detecting kidney damage early and treating underlying causes if possible, we may be able to reduce the long-term impact of kidney disease and give our cats extra years of quality life.