

Chronic Renal Failure: What to Expect?

Cats with CRF may need daily fluids to help flush toxins from the blood.

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Posted: Mon Apr 18 00:00:00 PDT 2005

Q. My little guy, Stash (who has a cute mustache) is 10 years old, and has been diagnosed with CRF, which I was told is chronic renal failure. Stash didn't show many signs of being ill; however, once in a great while he'd throw up cat balls. His eating habits are good. He's playful, active, drinks water OK and his potty habits are good. The vet did a blood panel test on Stash just prior to a dental cleaning and then ended up performing an ultrasound, and this is when he found that Stash has a sack around his already very small left kidney and his right kidney is shrunken as well. I took him to a specialist who said surgery would not help. Bottom line is that my baby boy is slowly dying.

How can I make all this easier for Stash? How will I know when to have Stash put to sleep? He has been a loving, playful, humorous buddy and roommate. I don't want to subject him to a poor quality of life.

A. I am sorry to hear that such a relatively young kitty has this disorder. The good news is that disease has been diagnosed fairly early, so with proper care, you may have a good deal of quality time to spend together. This case also emphasizes the importance of yearly blood screening for our feline friends as they age. I recommend performing these routine blood tests at about 8 years of age in cats, even if they seem healthy. The earlier we can diagnose a problem and begin treatment, the longer we can expect to ward off the devastating effects of these diseases.

Because I do not know the results of his blood work, it is impossible for me to comment on the necessity of daily fluids and/or other treatments for Stash. In general, as renal (kidney) failure progresses, daily or every other day administration of fluids under the skin helps to flush out the accumulation of urea nitrogen in the blood, a toxic waste product that is normally removed by functioning kidneys. The waste product makes kitties feel sick and can lead to the formation of uremic ulcers in the mouth and stomach, which in turn leads to inappetance and sometimes nausea. There is a subcutaneous catheter (G.I.F.) that can be placed surgically so that you do not have to stick your kitty with a needle every day, and should Stash require fluids, it might be worth investigating.

There are several important complications associated with the progression of renal failure. Two of the more common complications are hypertension (high blood pressure) and anemia. You should establish a routine for checkups with your veterinarian every three to four months (and sooner if Stash takes a turn for the worst) to monitor for these complications. If they are caught early and medication is instituted they can be managed for quite some time.