

Chronic Renal Failure Strikes

With proper care from his owner, a cat with CRF can live a longer life.

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Q. My 8-year-old cat was recently diagnosed with chronic renal failure (CRF). The ultrasound showed that his right kidney was in very bad shape. The X-ray looked as though the damage was due to antifreeze poisoning. I'm sure he didn't get into any antifreeze, because he's strictly an indoor cat.

His left kidney is small and triangular in shape. His creatinine was at 40; after flushing it went down a bit. From your vast experience, have you seen a cat survive with this high of a creatinine number?

A. I am sorry to hear that your kitty has been diagnosed with chronic renal failure at such a young age. Still, there is a good deal that you can do to maintain a good quality life for him. A large part of what makes cats feel so ill with renal failure is their inability to excrete urea. This causes their blood urea nitrogen (BUN) to be high. The fact that your kitty has a relatively low BUN (40 is abnormal, but most cats do not feel ill at that level) generally means that he will eat and not vomit, both important to maintain health.

Try to give him a diet that is specially formulated to keep the BUN low. Unfortunately, there is little that you can do to decrease the creatinine; however, I have seen many cats go on for quite some time with a creatinine in the 5 to 6 range, as long as we were able to manage the BUN. Also, it will be important to monitor his packed cell volume (PCV or HCT) as well as his potassium (K⁺), calcium (Ca⁺⁺) and phosphorus (P) levels. Most often, cat owners can administer subcutaneous fluids every day or every other day, which will often help renal failure cats to feel better.