

Your cat has been diagnosed with chronic kidney disease

What it means. Her kidneys have permanently lost some of their filtering capacity, so waste builds up in her blood and she loses more water than she should. It happened slowly and it won't reverse. In a great many cats it's manageable for years.

What it doesn't mean. It isn't an emergency today, it isn't contagious to your other pets, and it almost certainly isn't the result of anything you did or fed her.

Four numbers worth knowing

- **Creatinine and SDMA.** Waste products her kidneys should be clearing. Her stage is based on creatinine.
- **Phosphorus.** The value that most changes how she feels. Lowering it is the single most useful thing we do.
- **Potassium.** Drives muscle strength. Usually runs low early on and can run high in late-stage disease.
- **Her weight.** The most useful thing you can track at home, and the most often skipped.

Two more that aren't on the blood panel: **urine protein (UPC)**, which is cheap, available anywhere, and worth asking for by name, and **blood pressure**, which needs equipment a lot of clinics don't have. Both are treatable when they're found.

The first two weeks, in order

1. **Get more water into her.** Wet food instead of dry where she'll take it, more bowls in more rooms, wide and shallow rather than deep.
2. **Treat nausea before you fight about food.** Most kidney cats who won't eat are nauseated, not stubborn, and most never vomit. Ask your vet about an anti-nausea medication.
3. **Start one medication at a time**, two or three days apart, so you know what caused what.
4. **Book the recheck before you leave.** Ask when specifically, because it isn't the same interval for every cat.
5. **Buy a kitchen scale.** Weigh her weekly, same day, and write it down with the date.
6. **Sort the food out slowly.** A canned kidney diet is best if she'll eat it. Take two to three weeks to switch, and never on a day she feels rough. A cat eating an ordinary food beats a cat refusing the correct one.
7. **Put the medications on the fridge** with the times you actually give them, and tick them off.

Call the vet the same day if

- She's eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, or far less than normal for three or four days
- She's vomiting repeatedly, or can't keep water down
- Her ears, paws or legs feel cold against your cheek
- Her gums are pale, white or yellow
- She's weak, wobbly, collapsed, or can't stand
- She's breathing fast, hard, wetly, or with her mouth open
- She's straining in the litter box and producing nothing. In a male cat, go now
- There are no wet clumps in the box in twelve hours
- She hasn't passed stool in two days, or her stool is black and tarry
- She's restless and can't settle, and it's worse at night

Have these ready when you phone

Her weight. When she last ate, and what. When you last saw wet clumps in the box. Every medication she's on and when you last gave each one. Whether she's had fluids, how much, and when.

Never give her

Any anti-inflammatory or painkiller meant for a person. Ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin, and especially **acetaminophen (Tylenol)**, which is lethal to cats. Also never a leftover anti-inflammatory prescribed for another pet, and never a human enema, because phosphate enemas can kill a cat.

Full guides at kidneycats.org, written by Dr. Steve Pelton, DVM. Free, no products, no sign-up.