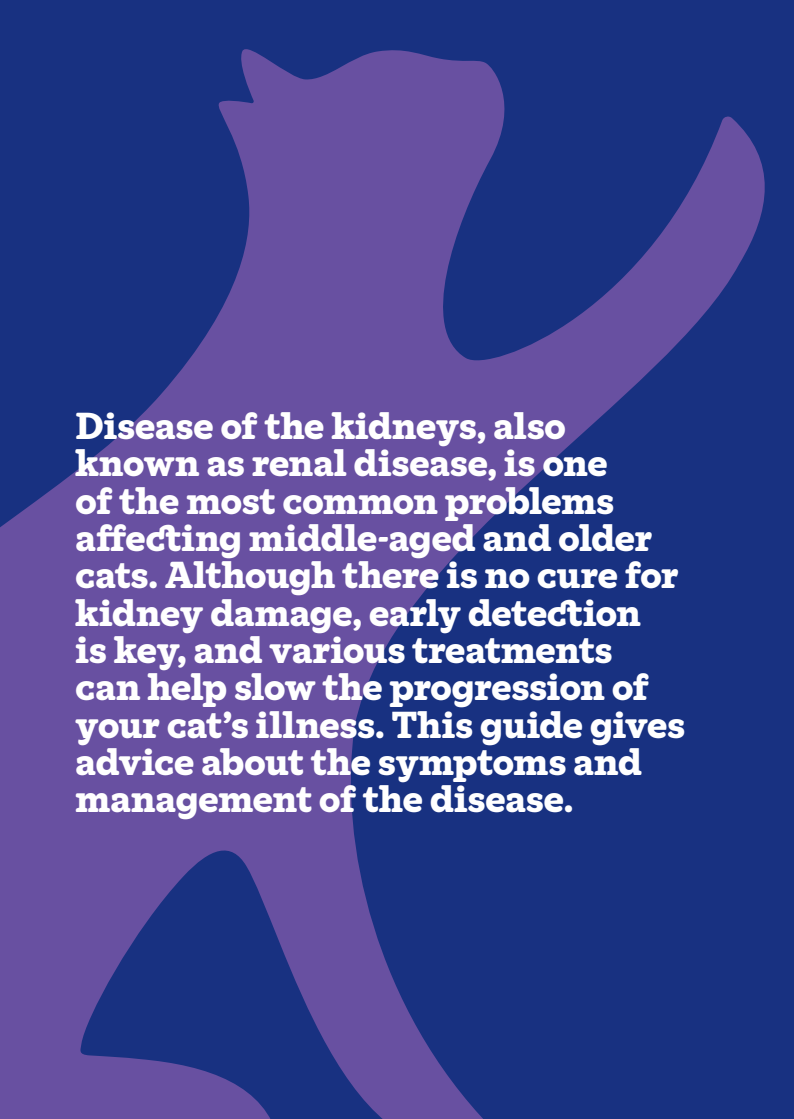


# Kidney disease

[cats.org.uk](http://cats.org.uk)



A stylized silhouette of a cat in a jumping or pouncing pose, rendered in a medium purple color against a dark blue background. The cat's front legs are extended forward, and its hind legs are pushing off, with its tail curved upwards. The overall shape is fluid and dynamic.

**Disease of the kidneys, also known as renal disease, is one of the most common problems affecting middle-aged and older cats. Although there is no cure for kidney damage, early detection is key, and various treatments can help slow the progression of your cat's illness. This guide gives advice about the symptoms and management of the disease.**

## **The function of kidneys**

The kidneys are responsible for filtering the blood to remove waste products and produce pee. They also

- control fluid and mineral balance within the body
- control blood pressure
- produce hormones
- help with red blood cell production

Kidney disease is generally divided into two types:

## **Chronic kidney disease (CKD)**

This is the most common type of kidney disease in cats and refers to a gradual-onset, long-term disease of the kidneys. The exact cause of the damage is often unknown, although it is more often seen in older cats, especially those aged seven years and older.

Other factors which may also have an influence on this disease are:

- inherited defects, especially in certain breeds of pedigree cats
- infection
- cancer
- urinary stones

Although the damage is permanent and tends to worsen over time, many cats can live happy lives for years after a diagnosis.

## **Acute kidney disease (AKD)**

This refers to sudden damage to the kidney or kidneys. It is usually a result of:

- toxins
- infections
- blockages to the flow of pee

Signs can be sudden and severe and urgent veterinary treatment is needed. Acute kidney disease can quickly become fatal. If a cat recovers from acute kidney injury, they may suffer from ongoing chronic kidney disease.

## **Preventing kidney problems in cats**

To help protect your cat from getting acute kidney failure, the best you can do is to limit your cat's exposure to toxins (especially lilies that are extremely toxic to kidneys) and make regular vet check-up appointments once or twice a year.

While it may not be possible to completely prevent your cat from getting chronic kidney disease, there are steps you can take to maintain the overall health of your cat's kidneys.

- Increase water intake. Make sure to keep their water bowl filled with fresh water at all times
- Feed wet cat food. If your cat is fussy about drinking more water, give them moisture-rich food to ensure they take in more fluids. For cats that will only eat dry food, try adding a little water to it if your cat would accept this
- Keep the litter box clean. Having a dirty litter box may discourage your cat from peeing in it, so it's important to clean it regularly and have it placed in a quiet spot with litter comfortable for your cat

## **Effects of kidney damage**

If the kidneys are not working properly, it can have a number of effects, such as:

- a build-up of waste toxins that damage other parts of the body
- dehydration as fluid is lost through the kidneys
- high blood pressure
- loss of essential minerals
- anaemia

## Signs of kidney disease

Most cats do not show signs of chronic kidney disease until around two thirds to three quarters of the kidneys have been damaged. Signs can vary between individuals, but the most common ones are:

- increased thirst
- passing larger amounts of pee
- poor appetite
- weight loss
- poor coat condition
- vomiting
- being quieter and less active
- bad breath

## Diagnosis

Blood and pee tests are used to diagnose kidney disease.

Blood tests will check for:

- increased levels of waste products normally removed by the kidneys
- anaemia (low red blood cells)
- evidence of infection

- other disease. Older cats are often affected and they may have other health conditions
- high or low levels of minerals such as phosphate, calcium or potassium

Pee tests will check for:

- how concentrated or dilute the pee is
- abnormal substances within the pee, such as protein
- evidence of infection

Blood pressure is normally also measured.

Using the results of these tests, your vet will discuss the stage of chronic kidney disease or grade of acute kidney disease with you. This follows guidance from a panel of experts called IRIS (International Renal Interest Society) and can help to guide the diagnosis and treatment of kidney disease.

Many vets will try to diagnose kidney disease in its early stages, before clinical signs develop, by offering cat owners the option of blood and pee tests for their older cats at routine check-ups or vaccinations. Early diagnosis and treatment may significantly extend an affected cat's life expectancy.

# Treatment

This depends on the stage of kidney failure your cat has, any identified underlying cause, the signs shown and impact of the condition on other body systems.

Treatment may include the following.

## Diet

Feeding a wet food diet and ensuring easy access to fresh water at all times can help prevent dehydration in cats with kidney disease.

The type of food given to a cat with kidney disease is important. Phosphate and products of protein breakdown aren't removed as effectively by damaged kidneys. Foods recommended for cats with kidney disease may have reduced but high-quality protein and reduced phosphate levels. This must be balanced with a cat's need for protein in their diet. It's also important that they are fed a diet that they enjoy and will be keen to eat so that they don't lose muscle or weight. Your vet may recommend a specialised diet for cats with kidney disease, or a supplement to be added to your cat's food to bind with the phosphate.



## **Fluid therapy**

If your cat becomes dehydrated, fluids can be given to your cat to replace lost water and minerals. Fluids may be given by your vet at the surgery, or in some cases, owners can be shown how to give fluids by injection under the skin to their cat at home.

## **Medication**

Your cat may be prescribed medication such as:

- supportive treatment for the effects of kidney disease, such as a poor appetite or vomiting
- long-term oral medication to control protein loss in their pee and/or control high blood pressure as both will further damage your cat's kidneys
- medication for specific problems associated with kidney disease, such as antibiotics for an infection

Cats should be closely monitored for any changes in their eating, drinking, peeing and activity levels. Regular check-ups with your vet, and further blood and pee tests, can help monitor progression of the disease.

## **The future**

Depending on the severity of the kidney damage, with regular monitoring and treatment when needed, many cats with kidney disease can go on to lead long and happy lives. The condition will deteriorate over time, and if you start to feel that your cat's quality of life is affected by their disease, talk to your vet. Euthanasia can be the kindest option for cats with advanced disease.

## **Looking for cat advice?**

The following vet-approved guides are available to download from **[cats.org.uk/information-leaflets](https://cats.org.uk/information-leaflets)**

## Essential guides

**Behaviour: Understanding your cat's behaviour** W84009

**Behaviour: Managing your cat's behaviour** W84010

**Bringing your cat home** W84002

**Caring for your cat** W84001

**Caring for your kitten** W84015

**Cats and people** W84014

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**Feeding and obesity** W84004

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**Keeping your cat safe** W84005

**Microchipping** W84008

**Moving home** W84003

**Neutering** W84006

**Pregnant cats, birth and care of young kittens** W84018

## Veterinary guides

**Arthritis** W83201

**Cat flu** W83216

**Digestive disorders: vomiting and diarrhoea** W83218

**Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)** W83209

**Feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD)** W83202

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**Hyperthyroidism** W83212

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**Kidney or renal disease** W83206

**Skin disorders** W83204

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**Cats and pregnant women: toxoplasmosis**

**Cats and the law**

**Cats with disabilities**

**Diabetes**

**Feline asthma**

**Feline coronavirus (FCoV) and feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)**

**Feline parvovirus (FPV)**

**Hypertension**

**You and your vet**

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