

# Your Cat

## CHRONIC KIDNEY (RENAL) FAILURE



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This leaflet has been produced collaboratively with the Feline Advisory Bureau.

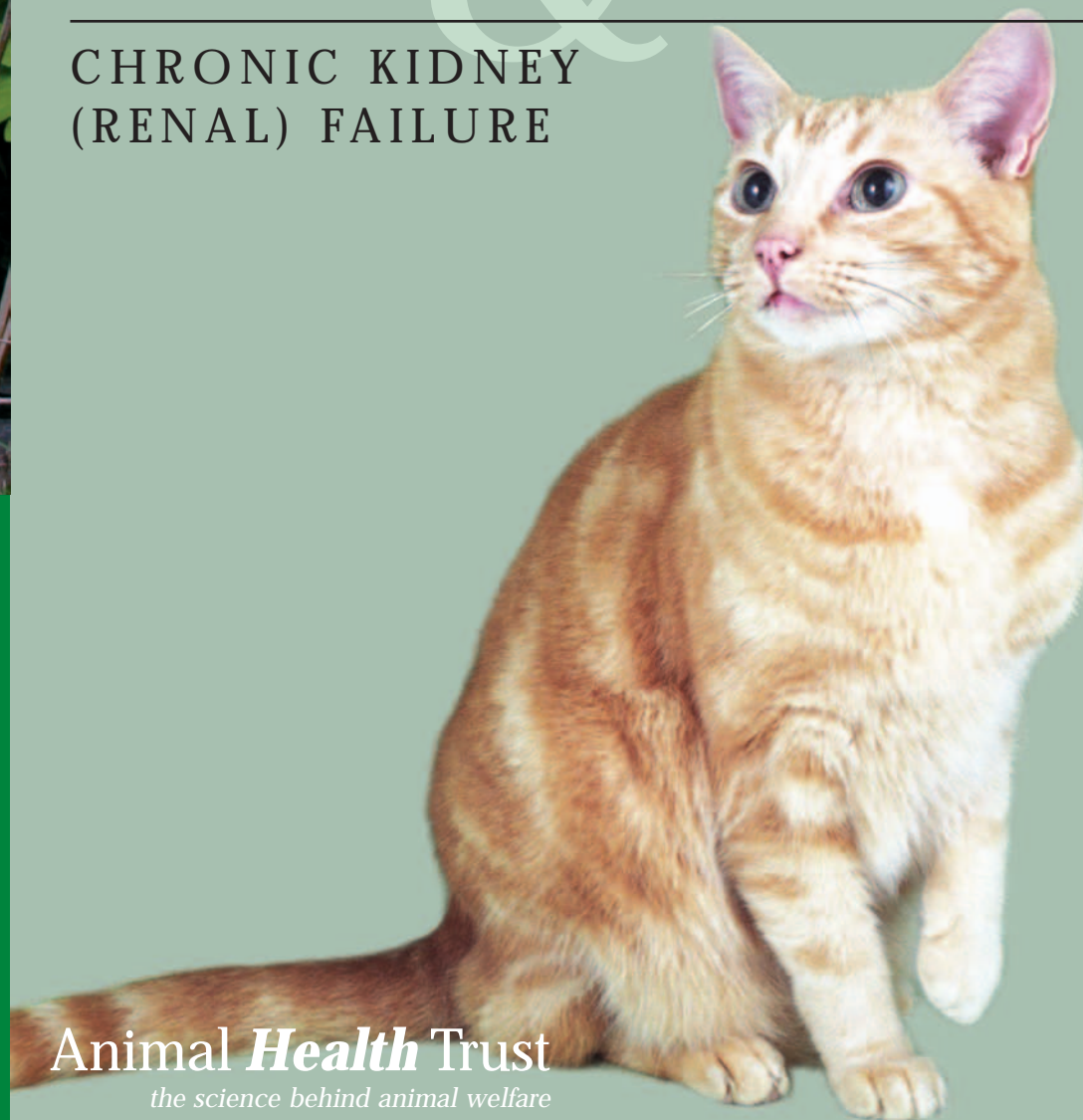
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# Your Cat

## CHRONIC KIDNEY (RENAL) FAILURE



Animal *Health* Trust

*the science behind animal welfare*

# Your Cat &



## CHRONIC KIDNEY (RENAL) FAILURE

Chronic renal failure (CRF, kidney failure) is one of the most common conditions affecting older cats. In most cases, CRF is progressive over time with gradual advancement and worsening of the disease. Although CRF is incurable, many measures can be taken to help manage the disease and improve the quality of life in affected cats.

### What causes CRF?

CRF occurs following long-standing, irreversible kidney damage that impairs the ability to excrete waste products from the blood. In most cases, the exact cause of the disease is unknown but normal kidney tissue is often replaced by large amounts of fibrous tissue. Some specific causes of renal failure are recognised though, and these include kidney tumours (eg renal lymphoma), persistent inflammation or infection in the kidneys, toxins that damage the kidneys and a condition called polycystic kidney disease, which is inherited in some breeds of cats.

### How common is CRF?

Cats of any age can be affected by CRF, but it is most commonly seen in middle to old-aged cats, and around 20% of cats over 15 years are affected. CRF is much more common in cats than in dogs.

### What are the signs and complications of CRF?

Generally, CRF has a slow, insidious onset, although occasionally the signs develop quite suddenly. Many affected cats show vague and non-specific signs with a poor appetite, weight loss, dehydration, lethargy and depression being seen most commonly, and this is often accompanied by an increased thirst. Other signs include a poor coat, anaemia, high blood pressure, vomiting, oral ulcers and weakness.

### How is renal failure diagnosed?

The diagnosis of CRF is made by collection of blood and urine samples for analysis of kidney function. Sometimes additional tests such as x-rays, ultrasound or even kidney biopsies may be beneficial, and repeat blood tests are needed to monitor progression of disease.

### How is renal failure managed?

Usually, there is no treatable identifiable cause for renal failure, and the changes in the kidneys will be irreversible. Treatment is therefore usually aimed at managing the disease and its complications, and trying to slow down its progression. As the kidneys are crucial for many bodily functions, adverse effects of CRF can be diverse and careful monitoring and treatment may be required.

### Fluids

Provision of adequate fluids is extremely important in CRF as there is a tendency for affected cats to become dehydrated. Some cats need stabilisation with intravenous fluids, but encouraging cats to drink additional water and providing tinned/sachet ('wet') food rather than dry food is important to help maintain a good water balance.

### Altering the diet

Using foods that have a restricted protein and phosphate content have been shown to be very beneficial in helping cats cope with CRF – their use improves the cat's quality of life, but also is likely to significantly improve longevity. Several commercial products are available, but again using tins/sachets rather than dry food is always recommended.

### Potassium supplementation

Some cats with renal failure develop low blood potassium levels which can be detected by blood tests. This can have a number of adverse effects but, when the condition has been identified, potassium supplements can be prescribed by your vet.

### High blood pressure (hypertension)

Hypertension is common in cats with CRF and can cause further damage to the kidneys and other organs such as the heart and the eyes. Blood pressure can be measured in cats, and if it is high this can be treated.



Blood pressure measurement.

### Other treatments

Other complications which arise commonly in CRF include anaemia, nausea, vomiting and anorexia. When these are seen, further treatment options are available to manage these complications. Some cats with CRF also lose too much protein through their kidneys and this too may contribute to further renal damage. Some drugs can be used to help reduce this risk (eg the so-called 'ACE-inhibitors').

### What is the prognosis?

CRF is usually a progressive disease and over time will eventually lead to the need for euthanasia. However, the rate of progression of renal failure varies considerably and appropriate supportive treatment can both increase the quality of life and slow down the progression of the disease.