

Your Pet's Kidney Failure – Where's It Really Coming From?

Two types of kidney failure often have one single common root cause, making it the primary issue to address to keep your pup's kidneys in sparkling good health. And if you see this symptom, get your precious one checked out as soon as possible because it's a telltale sign.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are two types of canine kidney failure: acute and chronic
- Acute kidney failure develops suddenly as the result of a precipitating event or underlying condition. The most common symptoms are vomiting, complete loss of appetite, and extreme lethargy
- Acute renal failure is a life-threatening emergency, and recovery depends on the extent of organ damage, the underlying cause of the condition, and the treatment the dog receives
- Chronic renal failure develops over a period of months or years, and there are a wide range of symptoms associated with this form of the disease
- In cases of chronic kidney disease, renal function often stabilizes for weeks or months at a time, and symptoms can be minimized with supportive treatment

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You may not realize it, but your dog's body (and yours) is producing toxins all day, every day. These toxins are sent to the kidneys where they are dissolved in water, filtered out, and excreted from the body during urination.

Healthy kidneys make highly concentrated urine, which means large amounts of toxins are being processed and excreted in a relatively small amount of water. A diseased kidney, on the other hand, requires an ever-increasing amount of water to handle the same amount of toxins.

That's why a dog with failing kidneys grows thirstier and thirstier over time, until eventually he simply can't drink enough water and toxin levels in the bloodstream become elevated.

When a dog's kidneys are no longer able to do their job of removing waste and concentrating urine, the animal is said to be in kidney or renal failure. There are two types of kidney failure: acute and chronic.

Acute Kidney Failure

Acute renal failure comes on suddenly in response to a precipitating event, for example, a dog might:

- Ingest a toxin such as a poisonous plant, antifreeze, or a human medication
- Have a urinary obstruction

- Contract an overwhelming bacterial infection
- Become severely dehydrated, typically because he doesn't have access to fresh drinking water
- Have blood flow to the kidneys disrupted during a surgical procedure, for example, or as a result of heart disease or heatstroke

Some cases of acute kidney failure can be successfully treated. In other cases, the disease moves from the acute phase to a chronic condition. Unfortunately, chronic kidney disease is almost always irreversible.

Symptoms of Acute Renal Failure

When kidney failure is acute, symptoms appear suddenly and are often severe. The top three to watch for are:

- Vomiting
- Complete loss of appetite
- Marked lethargy

Other symptoms you might notice:

- Straining to urinate and decreased urine production
- Disorientation
- Physical weakness; loss of coordination

Acute renal failure is a medical crisis that can be life-threatening, so urgent action is required to save your pet's life. If you suspect your dog might be experiencing acute kidney failure, get him to a veterinarian or an emergency animal clinic immediately.

Treatment for Acute Renal Failure

If your dog is diagnosed with acute kidney failure, he'll need to be hospitalized for intensive treatment. If he survives the initial crisis, his chances for full recovery of kidney function will depend on the extent of organ damage, the underlying cause of the condition, and the treatment he receives.

The goal of treatment is to provide supportive care while giving the kidneys time to recover. It can take from several days to a few weeks to determine whether a patient will improve, and to what extent.

Urine output is a very important indicator for recovery. If a dog continues to have low or no urine output as treatment progresses, sadly, the prognosis is very poor. If possible, performing acupuncture during this time can be very beneficial, as can several homeopathic remedies (based on your dog's symptoms).

If supportive treatment isn't working, there may be other options, for example, dialysis or organ transplant. Decisions about more aggressive forms of treatment depend on the availability of local resources, and more importantly, on how the dog's guardian feels about it.

Symptoms of Chronic Kidney Failure in Dogs

In contrast to the sudden onset of acute kidney failure, chronic renal failure is a much slower process, coming on gradually over months or years. Dogs of any age can develop the condition, but it is most commonly seen in older dogs.

Breeds that are predisposed to chronic kidney failure include the **Samoyed**, Bull Terrier, Cairn Terrier, German Shepherd, and English Cocker Spaniel. There can be multiple, wide-ranging symptoms of chronic kidney disease including:

- Increased thirst
- Poor coat condition
- Increased urination
- Mouth ulcers and bad breath
- Decreased or lack of urination
- Dehydration
- Urinating during the night
- High blood pressure
- Bloody urine
- Anemia
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Small, enlarged, or painful kidneys
- Hunched posture; reluctance to move
- Fluid retention in limbs and abdomen

Unfortunately, chronic renal insufficiency usually happens so gradually that by the time the symptoms become obvious, it's often too late to treat the problem effectively.

The kidneys are designed to compensate as they slowly lose function over a period of time, which is why obvious symptoms often don't appear until very late in the disease process.

Treatment Options for Dogs With Chronic Kidney Failure

If your dog's condition is caused by some factor other than damaged kidneys — for example a disease that decreases blood flow to the kidneys or a urinary tract obstruction — it's possible the problem with the kidneys can be reversed with appropriate treatment of the underlying cause.

If the disease is the result of irreversible kidney tissue damage, in many cases renal function will stabilize for weeks or months at a time. The disease will progress and kidney function will continue to deteriorate, but the good news is your dog's symptoms can often be minimized with supportive treatment.

Fluid therapy is the foundation of treatment for dogs with kidney failure, primarily to prevent dehydration due to the large amount of water that is passed out of the body. Subcutaneous (under the skin) fluid delivery may be necessary, and many dog parents opt to learn to do this at home with instruction from their veterinarian.

Potassium is often added to the fluids or the dog's diet to safeguard against muscle weakness and heart rhythm disturbances that result from low electrolyte levels. In some cases, intravenous (IV) fluids may also be required.

Additional Tips When Caring for a Dog With Kidney Failure

Your dog should have round-the-clock access to fresh, clean water. Withholding water, even overnight, will not solve her need to urinate in the middle of the night and could cause a real health crisis.

You'll also need to keep careful track of the amount of food and water she consumes each day. If consumption decreases, additional fluids must be administered to prevent dehydration. You should also weigh your dog at least weekly to insure she's getting enough calories to maintain her weight and proper hydration.

The food you feed a dog with chronic kidney failure is also critically important for disease management and overall well-being. I strongly urge feeding an organic, fresh food diet to pets with kidney dysfunction. A reduced amount of high-quality, human-grade protein is essential, as is eliminating all dry foods, which can exacerbate dehydration. Feeding a high-moisture, reduced phosphorus diet is crucial in managing your dog's kidney disease.

The only veterinarian-recommended commercially available fresh food kidney diet for dogs is made by Darwin's Natural Pet Products. An integrative or holistic veterinarian is your best resource for advice on the right supplements and medications as necessary, as well as other therapies that can help sustain your pet's health and quality of life.

Tips for Keeping Your Dog's Kidneys Healthy

Not every cause of canine kidney failure is known or understood, nor can every case of acute or chronic kidney disease be prevented. However, there are a number of things you can do that will help promote the health and longevity of your canine companion's vital kidney function.

- Insure your dog is kept safely away from toxic substances like antifreeze, heavy metals, rodenticides and other pesticides, common household medicines, and certain foods and plants.
- Any dog with a bacterial infection, urinary obstruction or other illness should receive appropriate treatment in a timely fashion.
- Insure your dog is never hit or kicked or allowed to run loose through the neighborhood to avoid possible trauma to her kidneys.
- Limit the drugs, vaccines, and chemical pest preventives your dog is subjected to throughout her life to reduce the amount of toxins her liver and kidneys must process. Kidney failure in elderly dogs is usually the result of worn-out organs.
- Feed an organic, fresh food diet instead of commercial pet food to supply your dog's body with the fundamental nutrition she requires for the health of every organ and system in her body.
- Make sure your pet gets at least one and preferably two wellness exams, including a urinalysis, with your holistic or integrative veterinarian each year. This is the best way to stay on top of your pet's health and

address problems as they arise.

Sources and References

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