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## Fact Sheet — Feline Kidney Disease

Feline kidney disease is also known as *chronic renal failure*. It is a progressive, irreversible deterioration of kidney function that can occur at any age. The tiny filters in the kidneys, called nephrons, begin to die off and lose their ability to help the body eliminate waste products and regulate electrolytes in the body. Waste products accumulate in the body and reach toxic levels. As the kidneys deteriorate, the cat can suffer electrolyte imbalances, anemia and high blood pressure.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms may not become apparent until more than two thirds of kidney function has been lost. They include increased water consumption, frequent urination, loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss, and declining vision. The disease may progress quickly or gradually. Early detection is critical—experts advise that even cats without outward symptoms should be checked for signs of chronic renal failure during their regular yearly exams once they have reached the age of seven.

**Causes:** It can be difficult to pinpoint why some cats develop kidney disease. Causes can include kidney infection, decreased blood supply to renal arteries, congenital disorders, toxic chemicals, feline leukemia virus infection, hypertension, or kidney tumors.

**Diagnosis:** To confirm a diagnosis of chronic renal failure, a veterinarian must perform a urine test to measure the concentration level of the urine and blood tests to check levels of BUN (blood urea nitrogen) and creatinine.

**Diet:** Veterinarians recommend that cats with chronic renal failure be given a diet that is low in phosphorous and relatively low in protein. This gives the kidneys less to filter.

**Treatment:** There is no cure—however, with early detection and proper treatment, a cat may have many good years left. Treatments to control the progression of the disease can vary, depending on the type of kidney disease and the degree of damage to the kidneys. The goal of treatment is to reduce the amount of waste products that the kidneys must filter. Treatment options include diet changes, medication and hydration therapy, which may be used to restore the electrolyte and fluid balance and increase the cat's comfort. If the cat's condition becomes critical, intravenous fluids may also be helpful.

**Transplantation:** There are facilities performing feline kidney transplants throughout the United States. Total costs are estimated at between \$5,000 and \$9,000. University facilities generally cost less than private facilities. The total cost includes screening tests, donor adoption, surgery for the donor and recipient, travel, hotel, extended hospital care, postoperative maintenance, and medications. The recipient must receive an anti-rejection medication daily for the rest of his or her life. The success rate for candidates whose illnesses have been diagnosed early is between 80 and 90 percent.

**Alternative therapies:** Holistic treatments include nutritional supplements such as vitamins, purified Omega 3 fatty acids and a customized diet with the proper balance of protein, carbohydrates, fats and vegetables. Some practitioners also recommend acupuncture, which increases blood flow to the kidneys, improving their function.