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Common Pet Diseases: Kidney Disease

The kidneys are extremely important organs that perform a variety of different functions, from removing wastes to regulating blood pressure to helping in the creation of more red blood cells. When the kidneys are no longer functioning correctly, many different organ systems can be affected.

What is Kidney Disease?

There are many reasons why the kidneys may fail. Sometimes infections such as leptospirosis, pyelonephritis, or Lyme disease can damage the kidneys. Sometimes young dogs or cats are born with a congenital malformation of the kidneys, which causes them to not function well (such as polycystic kidney disease). High blood pressure can cause many issues throughout the body, including damage to the kidneys. Despite the many causes of kidney disease, there are many instances where the underlying cause is never found. One of the first symptoms of kidney disease is drinking and urinating more frequently. This is due to the damaged kidney not being able to conserve water efficiently. Other signs include vomiting and diarrhea (from a build-up of toxic waste products in the bloodstream), anemia/pale mucous membranes (due to the kidneys not producing as much of a hormone that aids in the production of red blood cells), and general weakness or lethargy.

Diagnosing Kidney Disease

There are several different tests that can be used to monitor for kidney disease. Certain bloodwork values, such as SDMA, creatinine, and BUN (blood urea nitrogen), are checked specifically to see whether the kidneys are functioning properly, and are often elevated when kidney disease is present.

A urinalysis is also checked to see whether a pet is concentrating his or her urine appropriately, as well as to check for abnormal protein amounts. Furthermore, other tests looking for an infectious cause can be run (such as tests to check for leptospirosis or Lyme disease).

Treating Kidney Disease

Unfortunately, there is no cure for kidney disease. Furthermore, different treatments may be recommended for different patients, depending on the underlying cause and the severity of kidney disease. For patients with severe kidney disease, hospitalization is often recommended in order to flush out many of the toxins in the bloodstream. A special diet that contains low quantity/high quality protein and low phosphorus will help the kidneys process wastes more efficiently. Certain blood pressure medications may be prescribed to help reduce the risk of hypertension on the kidneys, as well as help reduce the amount of protein in the urine. Pets with kidney disease may not exhibit all of the same symptoms. Furthermore, several other diseases, such as diabetes, can present similarly to kidney disease. If you think your pet is exhibiting signs of kidney disease, it is important to take your pet to a veterinarian to diagnose the underlying cause of the illness.

Best Regards,

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