

Overview

Your pet's kidneys are critical for normal bodily functions, such as the removal of toxic metabolic waste products from the blood, and regulation of bodily fluids and hormones. What does acute kidney injury mean? It refers to an abrupt decline in the kidneys' ability to function, often due to a major event such as severe dehydration, blood loss from surgery or injury, or a reaction to medication.

Because the kidneys impact other areas of the body, the changes that occur as a result of acute kidney injury impact many other bodily systems, as well. When kidney function is reduced over a long period of time it can become chronic, as chronic [kidney disease](#). Sadly, chronic kidney disease typically goes undetected without proper monitoring with lack of identification until 65-70% of the kidney is no longer functioning.

Risk

Acute kidney injury is not a breed-specific condition, but does seem to occur more often in older animals. It can be the result of trauma, medications, toxicity, upper urinary tract infection, or blockage of the urinary tract due to stones, crystals, or tumors. Some of the most common poisons to be aware of are [antifreeze](#) because it contains ethylene glycol, lily flowers, and NSAIDS (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen).

Signs

It's crucial to notice the signs of acute kidney injury, which include:

- Lethargy
- Disorientation
- Problems with coordination
- Weakness
- Increased or decreased thirst
- Increased or decreased urination
- Lack of appetite
- Straining when urinating
- Vomiting

If you notice **any** of these symptoms in your best friend, you should contact your veterinarian immediately! These symptoms are indicators of many serious diseases and conditions, and your veterinarian can perform tests that will identify why your dog or cat is

sick.

Test/Treat

Your veterinarian may recommend some or all of the following tests to identify why your pet is sick:

- Chemistry tests to check for increased values that indicate kidney dysfunction
- A complete blood count (CBC) to evaluate red blood cells and white blood cells
- Electrolyte tests to evaluate hydration status and choose proper fluid supplements, if your pet is dehydrated
- Urine tests to rule out [urinary tract infections](#) and to evaluate the kidney's ability to concentrate urine
- Radiographs (x-rays) and ultrasound to visually evaluate the structure of the kidneys and check for blockage

Treatment can be very intensive as acute kidney injury is a serious and life-threatening disease. Pets are often hospitalized, and treatment is dependent on the underlying cause of the kidney injury. Your veterinarian will discuss treatment options that are tailored to the specific needs of your best friend.

Prevention

Being a vigilant pet owner is key to the prevention of acute kidney injury. If you notice that your pet has any of the common signs of AKI, or has had any exposure to known toxins, contact your veterinarian immediately.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.