smalltalk

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

AUTUMN 2018

Kidney disease

The possible causes, signs, symptoms and treatments

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XL Vets Pets

Clinical nutrition - how a team approach with your vet can achieve the best outcome

Gudi Stuttard BVSc MRCVS Shepton Vets

When your pet is unwell, there is a good chance that your vet will discuss nutrition and may recommend a specific food. This is perhaps unsurprising nowadays, as we understand more how our own diet can influence our health.

However, what is surprising is quite how much difference the right food could make, or the different ways in which nutrition can help. For example, for patients with chronic kidney disease, feeding a specially formulated diet is the single most important change we can make, and has been proven to extend life expectancy after diagnosis. In patients with other conditions, such as diabetes, feeding a consistent, appropriate diet helps support smoother management of the disease. It is even possible for nutrition to play a diagnostic role, in a veterinary exclusion diet trial to identify a food allergy.

So it's important that you try to stick to your vet's nutritional recommendations. But it's common for owners to have concerns, perhaps that their pet won't like the food or format recommended. Owners sometimes have strong views about their pet's diet and are reluctant to feed certain foods, and many have cost concerns.

Owners can feel nervous about raising these concerns, so it can be all too easy to agree to a dietary change in the consult room but quietly switch to another food later on. While well-meaning owners often try to find an appropriate alternative food, without the guidance and awareness of the vet, these changes usually have a negative impact.

If this resonates with you, it's important to remember that your vet will understand your concerns, and it is far better to speak honestly about them from the outset. Your vet will recognise that the recommended diet will have no benefit if you are unlikely to continue feeding it. They can suggest alternatives that are more palatable for your pet, or you! They may even be able to seek advice from a veterinary nutritionist to find the right solution.

Veterinary diets do usually have a higher price tag than normal foods, due to their high quality standards and scientific development. However, a higher digestibility means that the daily feeding amounts, and costs, of these diets are usually much lower than owners realise, and the difference over normal feeding costs is justified by the benefits they bring. However, again, discussing cost concerns with your vet allows you to work together to find realistic solutions.

So, when it comes to dietary support for your pet when they are ill, the way forward is to work together with your vet as a team. Be open to making the changes they recommend but be honest about your concerns. Set realistic goals for transitioning onto the right diet and, above all, if your vet has recommended a specific diet because of a health concern, speak to them before making any changes.

Cushing's disease
(Hyperadrenocorticism)

Article supplied by
Mount Vets

What is Cushing's disease?

Cushing's disease occurs in dogs when levels of the hormone cortisol become too high. Cortisol is normally released into the bloodstream at times of stress to prepare the body for a 'fight or flight' response. In dogs with Cushing's disease, the level of cortisol released is excessive and, if left untreated, dogs become unwell.

How is cortisol produced?

Two small glands situated near the kidneys - the adrenal glands - produce cortisol. The production and release of cortisol from the adrenal glands is controlled by the hormone ACTH. A pea-sized gland at the base of the brain called the pituitary gland is responsible for the production of ACTH.

Forms of Cushing's disease

Pituitary-dependent Cushing's disease

This is the most common form of the disease. It occurs as a result of a slow growing tumour in the pituitary gland. This tumour produces large amounts of the hormone ACTH.

Adrenal-dependent Cushing's disease

This form of the disease occurs when a tumour producing a large amount of cortisol develops in one, and sometimes both, of the adrenal glands.

The development of either of these tumours causes excessive release of cortisol into a dog's bloodstream. Over time, the signs of Cushing's disease will become more and more noticeable.

Signs of Cushing's disease

Cushing's disease is usually seen in older dogs. Small breed dogs and female dogs are more likely to develop the disease. Signs may be similar to those of normal ageing, so can sometimes be difficult to recognise.

The most common signs include:

- Increased thirst
- More frequent urination, possible incontinence
- Increased appetite
- Pot belly
- Thin skin
- Hair loss and/or skin disease
- Muscle wastage
- Lethargy or weakness
- Excessive panting

Your dog may not necessarily show all of these signs.

How is Cushing's disease **diagnosed?**

If Cushing's disease is suspected, we will recommend a series of lab tests to confirm the diagnosis. As this can be a difficult disease to diagnose, several tests may need to be performed on blood and urine. These tests will determine how much excess cortisol is produced by the dog's adrenal glands. Your dog will normally need to stay at the surgery for a few hours or the whole day whilst these tests are performed.

We may also recommend an ultrasound scan of your dog's abdomen to image the adrenal glands.

Cushing's disease causes hypertension and often loss of protein in urine. Both of these signs will be monitored closely. Once on medication for Cushing's these signs may resolve but often need to be treated alongside it

Treatment of Cushing's disease

Treatment is given to reduce the level of cortisol in your dog's blood, and will need to be given for the rest of your dog's life. The aim of treatment is to slow

down or stop the debilitating effects of this disease. Given the complexity of the disease it is important that your pet is carefully monitored whilst on medication. Regular examinations and blood tests are needed to assess the response to medication and general well-being. At these check-ups we will also chat to you about how you feel your dog is getting on.

There is treatment available for Cushing's, and is available as a capsule and given by mouth once daily. The active ingredient is called trilostane and this blocks the production of cortisol. This is a short-acting drug and needs to be given daily, preferably at the same time each day. It is most effective if given with food in the morning.

The most common signs of Cushing's disease, such as increased thirst, appetite and urination, tend to improve quickly, often within two to three weeks after starting the treatment. Other signs, such as hair loss and a pot belly, may take months to improve. Treatment is only effective if carefully monitored. Regular re-examinations are necessary to assess your dog's progress.

In the early stages after diagnosis (and after any adjustment in medication) we will need to examine and blood test your dog at 10 days, 4 weeks and 12 weeks after starting medication. These blood tests need to be performed 4-6 hours after medication has been given and your dog will need to stay in the surgery for a few hours.

Thereafter, if all is well, your dog should be examined by a vet every 3-6 months.

The medication for Cushing's is usually well tolerated by most dogs. If your dog develops any signs of illness while on treatment, please contact your veterinary surgery as soon as possible.

> "Early detection of Cushing's disease could give your pet a longer, healthier life."

By **Mark Allaway MRCVS**
Cliffe Veterinary Group

Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetes mellitus is a common hormonal disease of dogs and cats, caused by a deficiency in insulin production, or a failure to respond to insulin.

As a result, glucose absorbed from the food cannot be transported from the bloodstream into the cells where it would be used as energy.

Diabetes may be seen in all breeds and sexes, however some breeds may have a predisposition to development, and it usually develops in middle aged to older pets.

This disease can be managed successfully and easily with correct diagnosis, treatment and monitoring. It requires close support from your vet, and compliance on your part as the owner to ensure that good control is achieved.

Sometimes, there may also be other predisposing factors, such

as obesity (which makes the body less sensitive to insulin), Cushing's disease (an oversecretion of steroid hormone) and other diseases.

These can make control more complicated, and so pets with these predisposing factors should be identified and treated accordingly.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of diabetes often include weight loss despite an increase in appetite, with an increase in thirst and urination amongst others.

If you are worried your pet may be diabetic, then book a consultation with your veterinary surgeon, who will perform a clinical examination.

A diagnosis can be made with a combination of blood and urine tests, and it is often helpful to attend your consultation with a urine sample collected just beforehand.

Treatment of Diabetes:

Treatment of diabetes usually involves the administration of insulin by injection.

Your veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse will be able to discuss and demonstrate this to you.

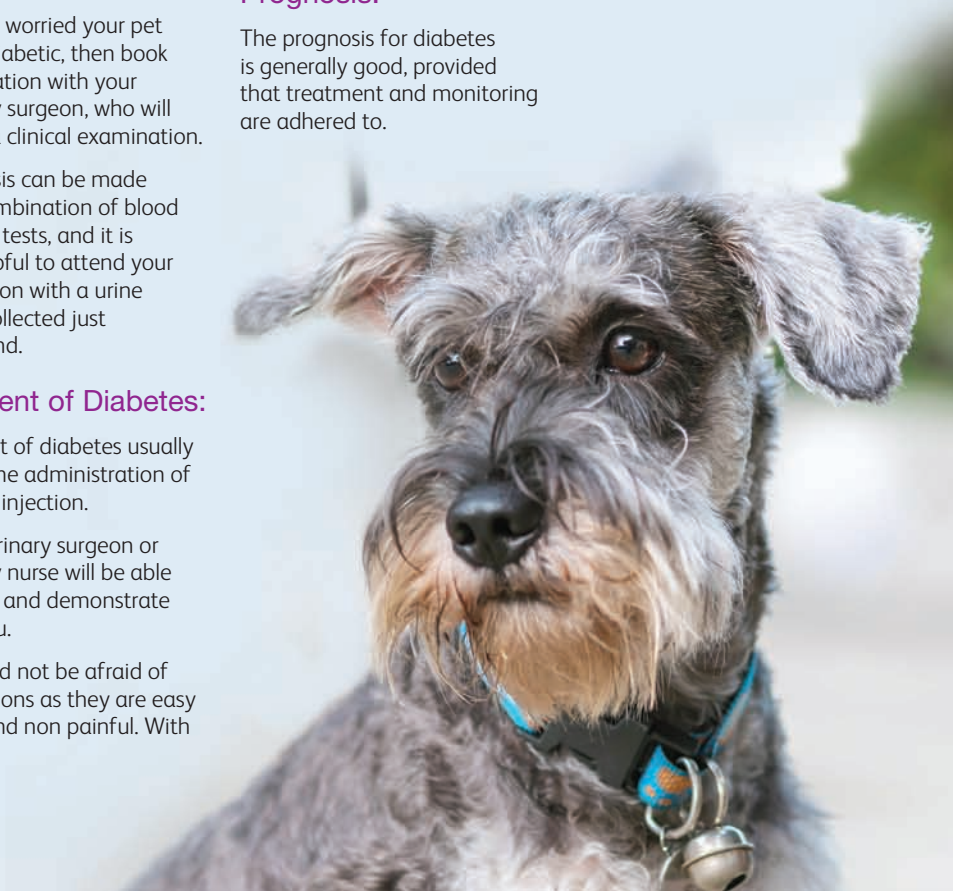
You should not be afraid of the injections as they are easy to give, and non painful. With time your confidence will increase as you realise your pet does not even notice the injections. In addition to your veterinary practice, there are also excellent online resources available to help you with learning about the condition, and the administration of insulin.

Regular checkups and blood glucose monitoring are essential, and many owners are able to monitor the blood glucose at home through simple pin prick monitoring.

Prognosis:

The prognosis for diabetes is generally good, provided that treatment and monitoring are adhered to.

Diabetes is usually a lifelong condition, however sometimes, with control of predisposing factors, some patients will return to normal function, and may therefore stop needing medication.



Hyperthyroidism
and the senior cat

By **Lucy Preece MA VetMB GPCert (SAM) MANZCVS (Medicine of cats) MRCVS**
Bishopton Veterinary Group

Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid) is the most common hormonal condition in older cats. Signs can initially be vague and worsen over time, but the condition can be successfully treated.

The cause is unknown, but it usually occurs when a benign tumour of the thyroid gland develops, causing excessive hormone production. This affects the metabolism, causing a range of signs:

- Weight loss
- Increased appetite, thirst and urination
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Increased activity
- Change in personality and coat

Vets may also note an increased heart rate, heart murmurs, high blood pressure and an enlarged thyroid gland in the neck. Most cats only show some of the signs and a small number actually eat less and are more lethargic.

If your vet suspects hyperthyroidism, blood tests are used to confirm the diagnosis. Additional tests, such as urine tests and ultrasound, may be necessary to investigate further. The excess hormone can cause changes to multiple organ systems, including the heart and kidneys, so it is important to investigate not only the hormone level but also the general internal health of affected cats.

It is reassuring to know there are a range of treatment options to suit your cat. Treatment can be divided into two categories; curative treatments (radio-iodine injection or surgery) and life-long management (medication or special diet). For otherwise healthy cats under the age of 15, it is better to aim for a cure, whereas ongoing management may suit older cats or cats with additional illnesses better.

Radio-active iodine treatment is the gold-standard treatment. An injection into the scruff of the neck selectively destroys the abnormal cells but leaves the normal cells. The treatment is carried out at a referral centre. Due to the radiation, patients must be hospitalised for a couple of weeks.

Surgery involves removing the affected gland(s) under anaesthetic. Patients should receive medication beforehand, to stabilise the hyperthyroidism. There are potential complications, but this treatment is usually very successful.

Medication can be used in the short-term before surgery/iodine, or as a life-long management treatment. Oral liquid or tablets are used to suppress excess hormone production. There can be side effects, so blood tests must be repeated regularly.

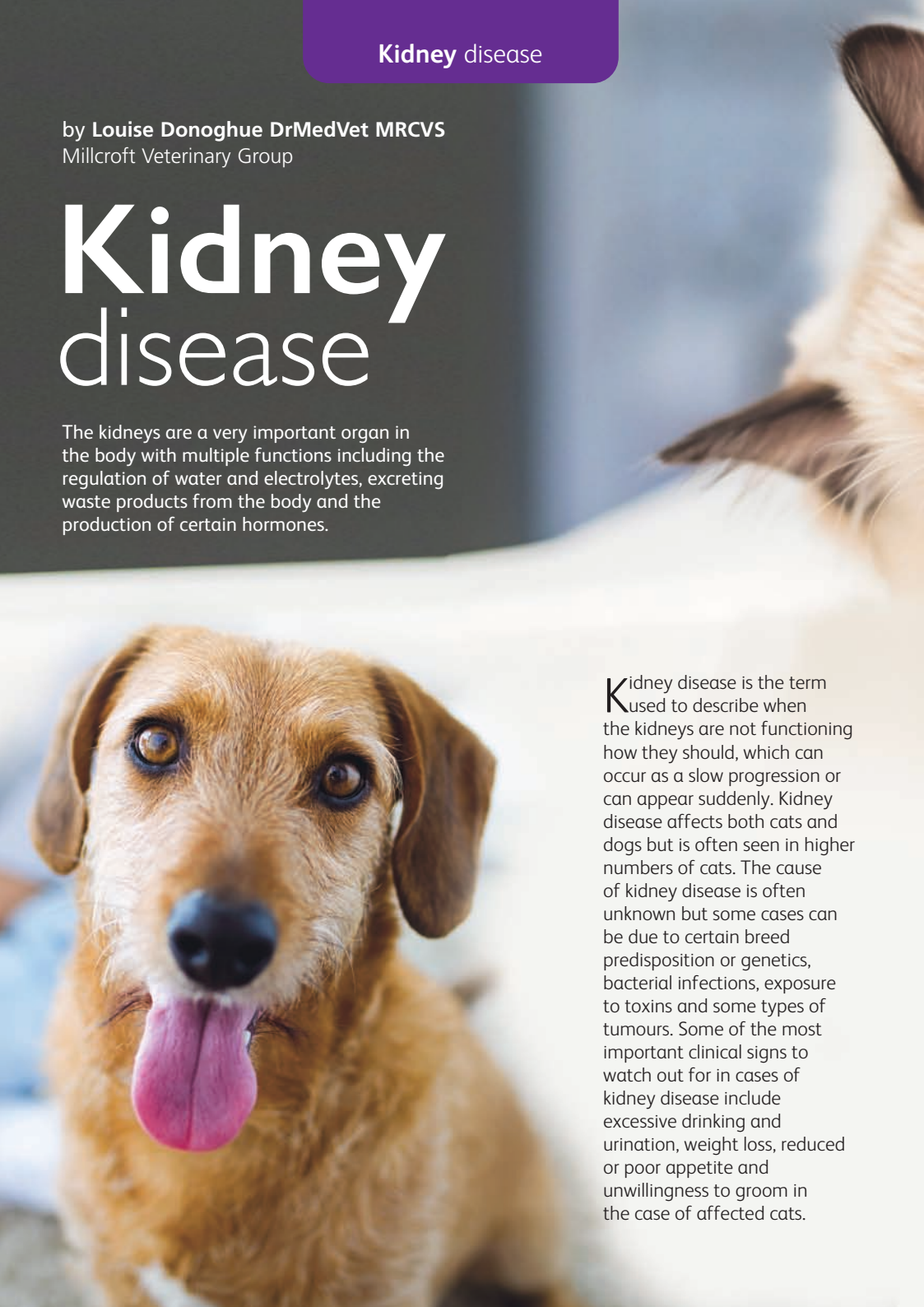
A special diet works by restricting the building blocks for excess hormone production.

Successful treatment of hyperthyroidism can give a cat many happy years after diagnosis, but early treatment is optimal. If you suspect your cat has hyperthyroidism, speak to your vet today.

by **Louise Donoghue DrMedVet MRCVS**
Millcroft Veterinary Group

Kidney disease

The kidneys are a very important organ in the body with multiple functions including the regulation of water and electrolytes, excreting waste products from the body and the production of certain hormones.



Kidney disease is the term used to describe when the kidneys are not functioning how they should, which can occur as a slow progression or can appear suddenly. Kidney disease affects both cats and dogs but is often seen in higher numbers of cats. The cause of kidney disease is often unknown but some cases can be due to certain breed predisposition or genetics, bacterial infections, exposure to toxins and some types of tumours. Some of the most important clinical signs to watch out for in cases of kidney disease include excessive drinking and urination, weight loss, reduced or poor appetite and unwillingness to groom in the case of affected cats.

Investigating cases of kidney disease can be done by a few different methods, with a blood test and checking a urine sample being the most common tests for an initial investigation. A blood test checks if there are higher levels than normal of waste products in the bloodstream, which suggests the kidneys are unable to excrete these products from the body. Urinalysis is the process of checking urine using a dipstick test to determine if any abnormalities are present and also determining the specific gravity of the urine which indicates how concentrated or dilute the urine is. Other methods available to investigate kidney disease include an ultrasound scan of the kidneys, radiography, taking a biopsy from kidney tissue and checking blood pressure. Measuring your pet's water intake is also a useful way to determine if they are drinking excessively and whether further investigation should be done.

Treatment of kidney disease depends if it is from a progression of the disease (Chronic Kidney Disease) or whether is has happened suddenly (Acute Renal Failure). In cases of chronic kidney disease there is no treatment that will reverse the causes of the disease but there are ways available to slow down the progression of the disease, including specially formulated prescription diets, encouraging your pet to increase its water intake, appetite stimulants and avoiding certain drugs that may worsen the disease.

Cases of acute onset need to be managed much more quickly and intensely often involving your pet being admitted to the clinic for intravenous fluids, pain relief and appetite stimulants.

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LATEST NEWS

Blue-green algae and its dangers to dogs

Blue-green algae is a term used to describe a group of bacteria, called cyanobacteria. They are not actually algae, but the organisms got this name because they often give the appearance of algae when they clump together in bodies of water. Blue-green algae may not always be harmful but you can't tell simply by looking, so it's best not to let your dog near the water.

When the algae blooms, it looks like a blue-green scum has appeared on the surface of the water. It sometimes looks a bit like pea soup. Blooms of blue-green algae can produce harmful toxins which stop a dog's liver from functioning properly. Sadly, exposure to toxic blue-green algae is often fatal, and can also cause long term health problems in dogs that survive after drinking or swimming in algae-contaminated water.

If your dog shows any of the following signs after drinking from, or swimming or paddling in water, contact your vet immediately and tell them you are concerned about blue-green algae: vomiting, diarrhoea, seizures/fitting, weakness/collapse/unconsciousness, disorientation/confusion, drooling, breathing difficulties. There is no antidote for the toxins produced by the bacteria, but if caught early enough, your vet will likely try to make your dog sick and attempt to flush the toxins from the body before they take hold.

These symptoms are commonly seen with other illnesses too, which are often less serious, but you should always call your vet if you are worried your pet is sick.

To be safe, keep your dog away from lakes and ponds that you know, or suspect, may contain blue-green algae. Don't let dogs drink from water that may have blue-green algae in and take note of signs warning of the algae during dog walks and follow the information given.