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Kidney Disease – Early Detection Thwarted By Silent Symptoms

By News Canada

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by: News Canada

(NC)–"The first clues started to appear about a year before I was diagnosed, but the signs were small and insignificant," said Carrie Donohue. "I was having intense headaches and muscle cramps in my hands and feet, and I was always thirsty. Looking back now, it seems obvious that these were signs of kidney disease, only my husband and I didn't know it then."

Carrie's story is not unique. When a person's kidneys fail, it seems to happen suddenly, without warning. They learn afterwards that their kidneys had been failing slowly – unknown to them – for quite some time. The signs were there, but often mistaken for something else, or simply overlooked.

These silent symptoms have given rise to new approaches in the effort to stem the tide of chronic kidney disease (CKD), which doctors estimate at 1.9 million cases in Canada today. Thanks to research and sophisticated disease tracking systems, specific groups of people have been identified as most likely to develop kidney disease and the push is on for better screening of those at risk.

The high-risk category includes people who are over 50 years of age, have diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease, or have a family history of kidney disease. Yet despite this knowledge, it remains difficult to identify chronic kidney disease early enough to begin the type of care that would either delay or avoid the onset of end-stage renal disease when either dialysis or a transplant becomes necessary.

"Many of the symptoms of CKD are difficult to diagnose," said Dr. Adeera Levin, former President of the Canadian Society of Nephrology and member of The Kidney Foundation of Canada's National Research Council. "Itching, thirst, fatigue and muscle cramping are not specific to kidney disease and don't raise a warning flag to most people, especially since they are likely living with other health conditions that tend to mask, or overshadow them."

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"We know that – if detected early enough – it is possible to reverse or slow the progress of chronic kidney disease," explained Levin. "For many people this could mean not having to go on dialysis or, at the very least, delay it for years."

The Kidney Foundation of Canada recommends that people at risk take a more proactive approach to their health. For example, if you are a person with diabetes, strict blood sugar control is important. Controlling high blood pressure can also prevent kidney damage.

However, not all people who develop chronic kidney disease fall into these high-risk groups. Carrie Donohue was otherwise healthy and in her mid-twenties when she began experiencing symptoms. That's why The Kidney Foundation also recommends that all Canadians learn about the warning signs of kidney disease, and that they talk to their doctor about the possibility of blood and urine tests to identify problems early.

Today, Carrie leads a normal life. Thanks to a living kidney donation from her husband, Ken, she was able to fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher. Her story has a happy ending. However, a greater understanding and awareness of the warning signs could make stories like these a thing of the past.

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Could Your Dog or Cat Be at Risk for Kidney Disease?

By Bev Allen

Could Your Dog or Cat Be at Risk for Kidney Disease?

Catching an Illness at an Early Stage Is Your Best Strategy

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Just like people, animals are susceptible to illness and stress. And, just like people, there is a lot you can do to keep them healthy.

Julie noticed her dog, Zac, was drinking more water. Not just once, but several days in a row. She knew that excess thirst can be a sign of illness, so she took Zac to her veterinarian for tests. Blood and urine tests showed that Zac was in the early stages of acute kidney disease. But Zac was lucky. Because his problem was caught early, Julie's veterinarian was able to treat the disease successfully and Zac made a complete recovery.

What Is Kidney Disease?

Briefly, kidneys filter and remove waste material from the blood stream. They also regulate the volume and composition of your pet's body fluids.

There are two types of kidney disease:

Acute - a sudden loss of kidney functioning which is sometimes reversible, and Chronic - a loss of kidney function that occurs gradually over time. Chronic kidney disease is often progressive, but, depending on the underlying cause and with careful management, animals often live comfortable lives for many years.

The causes of kidney disease can include inherited defects, infections, toxic substances and simply aging. Although the cause of kidney disease can be difficult to determine, with careful testing by your veterinarian, the disease can often be managed. Most treatments are aimed at decreasing the workload of the kidneys, reducing the severity of symptoms, and slowing the progression of the disease.

What Are Its Symptoms?

If kidney disease has undermined the kidney's ability to perform properly, waste materials accumulate in the blood. Signs that could indicate a potential kidney problem include:

- Loss of appetite
- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination or increased volume
- Poor hair coat
- Depression and/or vomiting

What You Can Do To Prevent Kidney Disease?

While kidney disease is most often found in older dogs and cats, even young animals can be affected.

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And while the disease is not always preventable, there ARE things you can do to help minimize the chances of your dog or cat developing the disease, such as:

- Feeding the best quality dog or cat food you can
- Providing continual access to clean, fresh water
- Eliminating toxic materials from the home
- Maintaining a low stress lifestyle
- Regular veterinary care to detect potential problems as soon as possible

You are your animal's daily detective and advocate. You are your animal's best chance for receiving medical treatment when the problem is still at an early stage and treatment is most successful. It is always better to prevent a disease, or to treat it early, than to have to treat it after it has become advanced.

Bev Allen is CEO and Founder of

, which is devoted to the welfare of all animals. Her

first product is ThePetCheckup™—the at-home, early detection health screening kit for

.

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