Tips for helping pets with kidney failure

Kidney problems are common and serious. The progression of the disease can be fast or they can live years with this condition. By the time your vet has diagnosed [kidney failure](http://www.examiner.com/topic/kidney-failure/articles), 75% of the total function of the pair of kidneys has already been lost. The kidneys are now losing protein through the urine, and having a hard time keeping the pet adequately hydrated. This leads to the animal getting thinner and less alert. It can also cause nausea and vomiting. The ammonia builds up in the blood, causing ulcerations in the gums and digestive tract. These can be painful and contribute to anorexia. The ammonia also slowly poisons the rest of the body, causing nausea and seizures when severe.

* Give plenty of water. Entice cats to drink by putting out a pet fountain, turning on the sink faucet, or leaving out large full dishes that they will not hit their whiskers on the sides of. Leave a night light on near water dishes, as cats often do not see water levels well unless the water is moving.
* Wet food is best, or watered down kibble if they will eat it.
* Moderate, highly digestible protein is desirable. Avoid by-products, as these can be feathers or toenails—not very digestible. The nitrogen in the protein is what the kidneys can no longer efficiently remove from the body. Thus these animals need more fluids to eliminate even a small amount of nitrogen/ammonia waste from the protein in the food.
* Increase beneficial oils such as salmon or other fish oils to add calories without adding more nitrogen load from protein. These oils also have excellent anti-inflammatory properties, which aid the joints, skin, and brain function.
* Use foods that are higher in wholesome carbohydrate and vegetable sources. Brown rice, quinoa, barley, sweet potatoes, fruits and green veggies are examples. These give energy without adding more nitrogen load from protein.
* Complex soluble fibers can potentially help trap ammonia in the gut. Look for inulin from chicory, brown rice, pumpkin, and other veggies.
* Acupuncture and herbs can improve quality of life, decrease nausea, and help maintain body muscle for cats and dogs with kidney problems.