

## Coping With Dog Urinary Problems

### Could your dog be suffering from a urinary problem?

*Marcia King*

The happy homecoming didn't last long. Elvis, a sweet 4-year-old mixed-breed shelter dog, had just arrived at the Goddard household. At his vet visit a few days later, they discovered he had chronic renal failure.

"We felt bad that the little guy had been suffering from this disease without being treated," says Bob Goddard, of Michigan, "but now that we knew, we were determined to make him feel better."

Chronic renal failure, also known as kidney disease, is one of several disorders of the urinary system. Here's what you should know about this and other common urinary disorders.

**Kidney disease.** Chronic renal failure is the gradual deterioration of kidney function. It typically, but not exclusively, occurs in older dogs.

**Signs:** Initially, drinking more water and urinating in larger amounts. As the disease progresses, dogs may not eat well, lose weight, vomit, and have an unhealthy, slow-growing coat, says Joe Bartges, DVM, Ph.D., American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine diplomate and professor of Medicine and Nutrition at the University of Tennessee.

**Treatment:** "Dietary management using a 'renal failure' diet has been shown to substantially increase the quantity and quality of life," Bartges says. Various medications help control other problems associated with the disease. "Dialysis can also control signs. Kidney transplants can be done, but are less successful in dogs."

**Prognosis:** Progressive, irreversible, and eventually fatal, but dogs can remain stable for months to years.

**Urinary tract infection.** A bacterial or fungal outbreak in the bladder or other areas of the urinary tract typically causes a UTI. Conditions such as diabetes, Cushing's disease, and chronic renal failure can sometimes contribute to the risk. It's more common in female dogs.

**Signs:** "Generally straining to urinate, blood in the urine, sometimes a strong-smelling urine — or no clinical signs at all," says Sandra E. Willis, DVM, DACVIM.

**Treatment:** Antibiotics, sometimes diet changes, depending on underlying problems, Willis says.

**Prognosis:** Excellent for uncomplicated, first-time UTIs. Recurring or complicated cases might require continuing therapy.

**Urinary incontinence.** This condition occurs when the sphincter muscle that holds in urine becomes weak, allowing leaking. It generally occurs in older female dogs, with large breeds, especially Doberman Pinschers, being predisposed, Bartges says.

**Signs:** Wet area where the dog has been resting; wet rear legs or tail.

**Treatment:** In most cases, drug therapy improves urethral function and prevents leaking, Bartges reports. Alternatively, treatments such as collagen injections into the urethra's wall, or surgery, can prevent leaking.

**Prognosis:** Good.

**Urinary stones.** Composed of various minerals, stones form in the urinary tract, causing irritation, blockage, or difficult urination. Dalmatians, Bulldogs, Dachshunds, Newfoundlands, and small-breed dogs have increased incidence of stones, Bartges says.

**Signs:** Blood in urine, straining to urinate, discomfort, inappropriate urination, and pain.

**Treatment:** Stone-dissolving medications or diets, or surgical removal of the stones, depending on the mineral.

Prognosis: “Good,” Bartges says, “although some types of stones are recurrent and may require more aggressive monitoring.”

With all urinary problems, identifying the cause, such as the type of stone or bacteria, is essential for getting the correct treatment, Willis advises.

Elvis was put on a strict renal diet — no snacks — and, later, medications to alleviate some of his clinical signs. Goddard says: “Both helped, and he lived a happy life for a couple more years.”

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