

# **POTASSIUM DEFICIENCY IN THE CAT**

Hypokalemia is the medical term for a depletion of potassium in the body. Potassium is one of the essential electrolytes that keeps the body healthy and functioning properly. It is very important in both kidney and heart function.

**CAUSE.** The most common cause of hypokalemia (low potassium) is chronic kidney disease. Cats fed certain diets or given a supplement to acidify the urine may be more likely to suffer from potassium loss.

**SIGNS.** In the beginning stages of potassium deficiency, signs are very subtle, and often attributed to “old age” or other diseases. Cats may exhibit weight loss, muscle weakness, stiff gait, poor hair coat, poor appetite, and listlessness. These signs may NOT be evident until the condition becomes acute and possibly life threatening.

**DIAGNOSIS.** Diagnosis is confirmed by the determination of low levels of blood potassium through blood testing. Laboratory results must be interpreted in relation to clinical signs and history since cats may have a normal blood potassium level and still have serious total body potassium depletion.

**TREATMENT.** Although severe potassium deficiencies may require hospitalization and intensive care, the treatment for chronic but not life-threatening hypokalemia is easily corrected by adding potassium glucomate to the diet. Tumul-K™ is a source of potassium glucomate that is available in a powder, tablet, and paste.

**RESPONSE TO TREATMENT.** Visible response to supplementation can take 4-8 weeks. Recheck blood testing to monitor potassium levels on a regular basis to ensure the appropriate dosage is achieved and maintained is essential. Lifelong therapy is usually required once hypokalemia has been diagnosed.