

# CARING FOR DIABETIC PETS

For more information, visit: Dogs and cats with diabetes usually require lifelong treatment with special diets, a good fitness regimen and, particularly in dogs, daily insulin injections. The key to managing diabetic pets is to keep your pet's blood sugar near normal levels and avoid too-high or too-low levels that can be life-threatening. A treatment that works for one pet might not work as well for another pet, and patience is important as you and your pet adjust to the new diet and medications. Management of your diabetic pet may include some or all of the following:

## Dogs

- A high-fiber diet is often recommended.
- Daily exercise is strongly recommended. Consult your veterinarian about an appropriate exercise program for your pet, considering factors such as weight, overall health and age.
- Owners should consider spaying female dogs diagnosed with diabetes.

## Cats

- A high-protein, low carbohydrate diet is often recommended.
- Daily exercise is strongly recommended, although it can be challenging to practice a daily fitness regimen with cats. Your veterinarian may be able to help you develop a plan.

It is very important to maintain the proper insulin and feeding schedules recommended for your pet. You will also need to regularly check your pet's blood and urine sugar levels. Regular exams and testing at the veterinary clinic can be supplemented with at-home monitoring of blood and urine glucose levels.

Watch for the signs of an insulin overdose, which can include weakness, tremors or seizures, and loss of appetite. Contact your veterinarian or an emergency clinic immediately if you observe any of these signs, and ask what you should do in the meantime to help your pet until it can be examined by a veterinarian. As signs of an insulin overdose can sometimes be very similar to signs of an insulin underdose, it is important that changes in dosage and frequency of insulin injections only be made by a veterinarian.

Diabetic pets should be monitored for long-term complications such as cataracts. Other problems that can occur include weakness due to low blood potassium (hypokalemia), high blood pressure (hypertension), or lower urinary tract infections. [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) | 800.248.2862 DIABETIC PETS Brought to you by your veterinarian and the American Veterinary Medical Association

Diabetic dogs and cats can live long and healthy lives with proper management and veterinary care. If you notice any changes in your pet's behavior or weight, consult your veterinarian.

DIABETES IS MORE COMMON in older pets, but it can also occur in younger or pregnant pets. Diabetic pets can lead long and happy lives thanks to early detection, proper monitoring, treatment, and appropriate diet and exercise.

## WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes mellitus, or diabetes, is a condition that occurs when the body can not use glucose (a type of sugar) normally. Glucose is the main source of energy for the body's cells. Insulin, which is produced by the pancreas, is required for the transfer of glucose from the bloodstream to the cells. In diabetics, glucose isn't transported into the cells and there is not enough energy for the cells to function normally.

In human patients, diabetes is classified as Type I or Type II. Type I occurs when the pancreas does not make enough insulin, and type II occurs when the body can not respond normally to the amount of insulin made by the pancreas. Although diabetes in pets is sometimes classified as Type I or II, the difference between the types is less clear in pets than it is in humans.

## WHAT PETS ARE AT RISK?

Diabetes in dogs and cats can occur at any age. Most diabetic cats are older than 6 years of age, and the disease is more common in neutered males. Most diabetic dogs are diagnosed at roughly 7-10 years of age. Diabetes is twice as common in female dogs compared to male dogs. Certain breeds of dogs may be predisposed to diabetes.

Obesity is a significant risk factor for development of diabetes. As dogs and cats age, they may also develop other diseases that could result in diabetes or could significantly affect their response to treatment for diabetes, including overactivity of the adrenal gland in dogs (hyperadrenocorticism) or overactivity of the thyroid gland in cats (hyperthyroidism), pancreatitis, heart disease, kidney disease, urinary tract infections and skin infections. The long-term use of medications containing corticosteroids is also a risk factor for diabetes.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF DIABETES IN PETS?

Noticing the early signs of diabetes is the most important step in taking care of your pet. If you see any of the following signs, your pet should be examined by a veterinarian. The earlier the diagnosis, the better chance your pet may have for a longer and healthier life.

- Excessive water drinking and increased urination
- Weight loss, even though there may be an increased appetite
- Decreased appetite • Cloudy eyes (especially in dogs)
- Chronic or recurring infections (including skin infections and urinary infections)

## HOW IS DIABETES DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

Diabetes may be suspected based on the signs a pet is showing, but the diagnosis is confirmed by your veterinarian by finding consistently high sugar levels in your pet's blood and urine. Although a diagnosis of diabetes is often relatively straightforward, your veterinarian may run additional blood tests to rule out other medical conditions seen in older pets. A urine culture might be recommended to rule out a urinary tract infection.

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, your veterinarian may prescribe an initial dose and type of insulin for your pet. Insulin cannot be given orally – it must be given by injection under the skin. Your veterinarian or veterinary technician will teach you how to give the insulin injections, which involve a very small needle and are generally very well tolerated by the pet. It is not a one-size-fits-all treatment; your veterinarian may need to periodically adjust your pet's treatment regimen. Dietary recommendations are an important part of treatment. Successful treatment of diabetes requires regular examinations, blood and urine tests, and monitoring your pet's weight, appetite, drinking and urination.

Courtesy of the AVMA for more information, visit: [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)