

Diabetes in Pets

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition that occurs when the body cannot use glucose properly. The body must produce insulin (a hormone) in the pancreas to control the levels of glucose (or sugar) in the blood. Glucose is needed to provide energy for the cells in the body but needs to be maintained at a proper level. Insulin helps the body move glucose where it needs to go into the body cells. When the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot use it correctly, glucose cannot get where it needs to go in the body and builds up in the blood stream. Glucose builds up to high levels, also called hyperglycemia. As glucose continues to build, it spills out of the blood stream and into urine – bringing water with it.

What are the Symptoms?

As glucose is not being delivered correctly throughout the body, muscle and fat start to break down to be used as energy. Weight loss is one of the common signs of diabetes as a pet is not able to convert their food into what they need to maintain their weight. With glucose and water being flushed out of the body, increased water consumption and thirst are common signs of diabetes. Changes in appetite, whether increased or decreased, are also common in diabetes.

Risk Factors

It is important to note that diabetes can occur in cats and dogs of any age. It is more common, however, for dogs to become diagnosed over the age of seven, and for cats over the age of six. Female dogs are twice as likely to become diabetic than males. Obesity is another common risk factor, as overweight pets are much more likely to become diabetic. There are some medical conditions that can occur in conjunction with diabetes such as pancreatitis, heart disease, thyroid dysfunctions, kidney disease, and infections.

Diagnosis and Treatment

The best way to diagnose diabetes is through labwork, specifically blood and urine samples. Easily obtained in the veterinary office, results can indicate whether your pet is diabetic. Just as in people, diabetes in pets is managed through insulin injections given under the skin. Our staff will teach you how to give these injections at home, and most pets tolerate them much better than owners expect. These injections are typically given every 12 hours after a meal. Your veterinarian will determine a starting dose and then closely monitor your pet's response. Their insulin dose may need to be adjusted to find the right dose for their body's needs.

Outlook

Dogs and cats who are diabetic usually require lifelong treatment to manage their condition. Once started on insulin, most pets respond quite well and only need occasional follow ups to monitor. It is important to keep blood sugar levels stable by only feeding at mealtimes and not skipping doses of insulin. Keeping pets at a healthy weight and giving them plenty of activity can help them maintain their health. Close monitoring for signs of high or low blood sugar is important in diabetic pets. If you notice any changes to appetite, energy levels, behavior, or new symptoms, call us right away. While diabetes might seem like an overwhelming diagnosis, many diabetic pets go on to live a long and happy life and do quite well despite their diagnosis.