

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN CARING FOR A DIABETIC PET?

Dogs with diabetes, and many cats with the condition, usually require lifelong treatment. This said, some cats are lucky in that proper treatment might be able to reverse the diabetes, with no further need for medications to control blood sugar. In those cases, it's best to have your veterinarian confirm any suspected disease reversal. Don't just stop or adjust the treatment on your own.

The key to managing diabetic pets is to keep the animals' blood glucose near normal levels, and avoid too-high or too-low levels that can be life-threatening. A treatment plan that works for one pet might not work as well for another pet. Be patient as you and your pet adjust to the new diet, medications, and lifestyle.

These are a few important things you can do to give your pet their best chance at success:

- Maintain your pet's medication and feeding schedules as recommended by your veterinarian.
- Ensure your pet maintains a normal appetite while receiving insulin or another diabetes medication. Otherwise, they may develop low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).
- Monitor your pet's blood and urine glucose levels, as recommended by your veterinarian. If your cat is receiving an oral medication instead of insulin, you also may be asked to monitor your pet's urine ketone levels to ensure they remain within the normal range.
- Monitor your pet for complications.

Hypoglycemia—which may be caused by an overdose of insulin or other drugs to treat diabetes—is an important complication to be aware of, as it can be a medical emergency. Watch for these signs that something's wrong:

- Weakness or lethargy
- Tremors
- Seizures
- Uncoordinated movements or walking strangely

There's also diabetic ketoacidosis, which may occur with too little insulin or diabetes medication. This potentially life-threatening condition can develop when the body's cells are unable to use glucose for energy and break down fat instead. If left uncorrected, a shift can occur in the body's acid-base balance, leading to other dangerous abnormalities. So watch out for these signs, too:

- Sweet-smelling breath
- Vomiting
- Acting more quiet than usual
- Diarrhea
- Reluctance to eat or drink
- Troubled or rapid breathing
- Weakness or collapse

Immediately contact your veterinarian or an emergency clinic if you observe any of these signs, and ask what you can do to help your pet until the veterinarian can see the animal. Because signs of a medication overdose can be similar to those of an underdose, it's important that you not change the amount or timing of your pet's medication without a veterinarian's guidance.

Other complications to watch for include cataracts, hind leg weakness due to low blood potassium, high blood pressure, and urinary tract infections. If you notice any changes in your pet's behavior or weight, consult your veterinarian.

The earlier your pet is diagnosed and started on treatment, the better chance of avoiding complications caused by chronically high blood sugar.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO KEEP YOUR PET HAPPY AND HEALTHY AS LONG POSSIBLE, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

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Diabetic dogs and cats can live long, comfortable lives with appropriate treatment and monitoring.

Has your dog or cat been drinking and urinating more than usual lately? Eating more but losing weight? These could be signs of diabetes.

Diabetic dogs and cats can live long, comfortable lives with appropriate treatment and monitoring. It all starts with a visit to your veterinarian, and a commitment from you to take a few extra steps in caring for your pet.

WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes mellitus, or diabetes, is a common, treatable condition that occurs in people and certain pets when the body can't use glucose (a type of sugar) normally. Glucose is the main source of energy for the body's cells.

The amount of glucose in the blood is primarily controlled by a hormone called insulin, which is made by the pancreas. If there isn't enough insulin, or if the body is unable to use the insulin, glucose accumulates in high levels in the blood—a condition called hyperglycemia. When that glucose reaches a certain level, it overflows into the urine and draws large volumes of water with it. This is why diabetic pets often drink more water and urinate more frequently and in larger amounts.

In diabetics, not enough glucose is transported into the body's cells. As a result, there isn't enough energy for the cells to function normally, and tissues become starved for energy. This causes the body to break down fat and muscle tissue, which is then converted into sugar. The breakdown of body tissues results in the weight loss often seen in diabetic patients.

In people, diabetes is classified as type 1 or type 2. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas doesn't make enough insulin, and type 2 occurs when the body can't respond normally to the amount of insulin the pancreas makes. Although diabetes in dogs and cats is sometimes classified as type 1 or 2, there's less difference between these types in pets than there is in people.

WHAT PETS ARE AT RISK OF DIABETES?

Diabetes in dogs and cats may occur at any age. However, diabetic dogs are usually 4 to 14 years old, and most are diagnosed at roughly 7 to 10 years old. Most diabetic cats are older than 6 years.

Diabetes occurs in female dogs twice as often as male dogs. Certain breeds of dogs and cats may be predisposed to the condition.

These health factors can increase your pet's risk of developing or having diabetes:

- Dental disease
- Long-term use of steroid medications or progestin
- Obesity
- Pancreatic disease
- Pregnancy
- Skin infections
- Urinary tract infections
- Amyloidosis (cats)
- Hyperthyroidism (cats)
- Kidney disease (cats)
- Cushing's disease (dogs)
- Hypothyroidism (dogs)

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF DIABETES IN PETS?

Noticing the signs of diabetes is the most important step in taking care of a diabetic pet. **Immediately take your pet to the veterinarian if you see any of the following:**

- Excessive drinking and increased urination
- Weight loss, with or without increased appetite
- Cloudy eyes (due to cataracts, especially in dogs)
- Walking or standing unusually, with the ankles touching or nearly touching the ground (cats)
- Chronic or recurring infections (including skin and urinary tract infections)

The earlier your pet is diagnosed and started on treatment, the better chance of avoiding complications caused by chronically high blood sugar.

HOW IS DIABETES DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

Your veterinarian may suspect diabetes based on the signs your pet is showing. To confirm any suspicions and rule out other diseases, your veterinarian likely will recommend a panel of blood and urine tests, including urine bacterial culture. Diabetic pets consistently have high amounts of glucose in their blood and urine. They also may have a urinary tract infection.



The aim of treatment is to keep your pet's blood sugar levels within a healthy range to prevent complications and maintain a good quality of life. Insulin injections and dietary therapy are core components. For cats not previously treated with insulin, your veterinarian may recommend an oral medication instead of insulin.

If insulin is recommended, your veterinarian will prescribe an initial dose and type of insulin that best suits your pet's individual needs. The veterinary team will teach you how to give insulin injections, which involve a very small needle and are generally very well tolerated by pets. Insulin injections usually need to be given twice a day to keep blood glucose levels under control. The dose and timing of the injections may need a few adjustments at first, depending on how your pet responds.

Dietary therapy focuses on helping obese pets lose weight, and stopping diabetes-associated weight loss in others, while providing suitable amounts of protein and carbohydrates. Regular exercise may be prescribed, too, based on your pet's age, weight, and overall health. Getting cats to exercise can be a little challenging, so be sure to ask your veterinarian for ideas.

Successful treatment of diabetes requires regular monitoring, including veterinary checkups, blood and urine tests, and assessments of your pet's weight, appetite, drinking, and urination. Your veterinarian may need to adjust the treatment schedule from time to time, based on these results.