

DIABETES

Diabetes is a disease caused by a deficiency of insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced by the pancreas, and is necessary for body tissues to use blood sugar. Without insulin, sugar remains in the blood and eventually passes into the urine. Pets with diabetes become very hungry and lose weight because the body cannot use the sugar in the blood. As the disease progresses chemicals called ketones accumulate, resulting in vomiting and dehydration. High levels of sugar in the blood and urine predispose diabetic animals to infection. Diabetic animals may also develop blindness or neurologic problems secondary to the disease. Eventually, coma and death can occur in untreated animals. Diabetes is not considered a curable disease but with proper treatment the disease can be controlled.

The exact cause of diabetes is not always clear. In some animals there appears to be a genetic predisposition to develop diabetes since several animals in the same family may develop the disease. Repeated bouts of pancreatic inflammation (pancreatitis) can cause damage to the cells that produce insulin in some pets. Prolonged use of some medications can lead to diabetes. In some of these cases, the diabetes will resolve when the medication is discontinued.

Most pets require several days of hospitalization when first diagnosed with diabetes. This allows us to monitor blood and urine sugar concentrations very closely until your pet's condition is stabilized. Many diabetic animals have secondary infections at the time of diagnosis and these must be under control before blood sugar levels will stabilize. If your pet is dehydrated or has electrolyte imbalances fluids will be used to correct these problems. Diabetic pets require regular monitoring to ensure they stay healthy. Generally, it is necessary to recheck a pet's blood sugar levels a week or two after starting treatment or changing the dose and then periodically thereafter.

Just as in humans, diet plays an important role in the treatment of pets with diabetes. It is very important to closely adhere to the prescribed diet. Feed your pet at approximately the same times each day. Do not change your pet's diet or give extra treats unless you have talked first with the veterinarian. Diabetic animals usually eat eagerly. If your pet does not seem as interested in its food this may signal a problem and you should call the clinic as soon as possible.

In humans, diabetes is managed with either injections of insulin or oral medication to stimulate insulin production. Many cats also respond to oral medication and diet changes, although some require daily insulin injections. Unfortunately, the oral medications are not effective in dogs; so canine patients with diabetes require daily insulin injections.

If your pet is treated with insulin you will be shown how to administer the injections. It is usually best if several family members can learn to give these injections in case the usual caregiver is not available. It is very important that these injections be given at the same time each day. Always feed your pet before giving the insulin. If your pet refuses to

eat, do not give the insulin until you have called the clinic. Do not give the injection in exactly the same spot each day, as this may lead to scar tissue at the injection site. After giving the injection, give your pet lots of praise and a treat. Be sure you are very clear on how to give the injections. If you have any questions, please ask the doctor or one of technicians.

Occasionally insulin treatment may result in blood sugar levels that are too low. This is most likely to happen 3 to 7 hours after insulin treatment. Your pet may seem weak, uncoordinated, or may have a seizure. Always keep a sugar containing syrup (corn syrup, honey, or pancake syrup) handy to treat low sugar levels. If your pet seems weak or acts drunk, offer a meal with some added sugar or syrup. If your pet has a seizure or is too weak to eat, rub the syrup on the gums and inside the lips. Do not try to force a convulsing animal to swallow the syrup. Call the clinic immediately if you observe signs of low blood sugar.

While oral medication for diabetes is generally well tolerated, some cats may develop liver problems while on the medication. Signs of these liver problems include decreased appetite, vomiting, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin, gums, and whites of the eyes.) If you observe any of these symptoms, please call the clinic.

Contact the clinic if you observe any of the following:

- Decreased appetite.
- Signs of low blood sugar.
- Major changes in your pet's water consumption or urination.
- Weight loss.
- Signs of liver problems.