



Caring for your diabetic cat

Diabetes mellitus is a common problem in both dogs and cats. Caring for a diabetic animal requires some effort, but most pets remain happy and comfortable. Successful patient management requires a team effort between you and your veterinarian. This information is intended as a guideline only; always follow any specific instructions from your veterinarian and always ask if you have questions.

What is diabetes mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus is a condition in which the body either doesn't properly produce or use insulin. Insulin is necessary for the movement of glucose from the blood into the cells of the body, so patients with diabetes have high blood sugar levels (also referred to as glucose concentrations).

What are the signs of diabetes?

Excessive thirst, frequent urination, increased hunger, sudden weight loss and weakness or fatigue are seen in cats with diabetes. These changes often can be minimized when the blood sugar levels are under control.

Why is my cat a diabetic?

Feline diabetes is a complex disease, and most likely genetic and environmental factors both play a role. Many cats with diabetes have a history of chronic pancreatitis, or a disease which affects the body's response to insulin. We do know that obesity is commonly associated with feline diabetes, along with the use of certain medications, particularly steroids. If your cat is overweight, this needs to be addressed. Be sure to discuss any medication your cat is receiving with your veterinarian, in case this is related to the onset of the diabetes.



Is there a cure for diabetes?

Although there is currently no 'cure' for cats with diabetes, some cats undergo spontaneous remission a few months after diagnosis. This means that the diabetes goes away temporarily, and the cat is once again able to control his or her blood sugar levels. There is evidence to suggest that remission is most likely if the diabetes is treated effectively when first diagnosed. Cats with prolonged poor control of their diabetes are unlikely to achieve remission.

Will my cat need insulin?

Some veterinarians feel that insulin is the treatment of choice for cats with diabetes. A small number of cats may briefly respond to oral hypoglycemic drugs, but these products do not generally provide adequate glycemic control. In fact, cats started on oral therapy are less likely to go into remission, and more likely to be permanently diabetic. Although it may seem scary to give your cat insulin, owners may soon become very comfortable with this treatment option.

What does the insulin do?

Insulin moves glucose from the blood into the cells. Glucose is an essential fuel for most of the tissues in the body, and without insulin, cell metabolism is severely compromised. So, insulin causes blood glucose levels to move down. Insulin needs to be dosed very carefully, as too much insulin will cause dangerous hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

How do I give insulin?

Your veterinary team will show you exactly how to give insulin injections, but it's really very simple. The insulin dose is pulled up into a special syringe, and injected under the skin. Most people find it easiest to inject between the shoulder blades or along the back.

Do the insulin injections hurt?

Insulin syringes have very small needles, and most cats do not notice the injection. It can help to distract your cat with a treat or toy when you give the injection, and be sure to offer lots of petting and affection afterwards. If you've ever had to give your cat pills or liquid medications in the past, you'll be amazed at how simple it is to give an insulin injection.

Why do I need to check glucose levels at home?

Learning to measure your cat's glucose levels is very worthwhile. Firstly, information collected at home is a reflection of what's happening day to day in the cat's normal living environment. Cats in particular can become very stressed in the clinic, and their blood sugar levels can become markedly increased. Even just the sight of the carrier can cause a sharp spike in glucose concentrations. Your veterinarian can use the values you provide to adjust insulin therapy more appropriately. Secondly, if your cat seems unwell, you can quickly determine if blood sugar levels are dangerously high or low. Low blood sugar (which means that too much insulin is present) can cause weakness, seizures and even death.

How do I check the glucose?

One way is with the AlphaTRAK® Blood Glucose Monitoring System. It just takes one drop of blood to measure blood glucose. A lancet can be used to easily to collect a sample from the ear tip or paw pad and then simply hold the test strip against the blood drop. The blood is quickly drawn into the test strip, and the AlphaTRAK meter does the rest. The AlphaTRAK unit is a portable blood glucose monitor validated and calibrated for dogs and cats, and displays a measurement in just a few seconds. The AlphaTRAK Instructional Video provided will show you exactly what to do. If you need further information, you can also visit www.alphatrakmeter.com for more suggestions.

How often should I check blood glucose levels?

Your veterinarian will give you specific instructions on when to check sugar levels. However, it is always a good idea to check sugar levels if

- Your cat seems weak or confused – these can be signs of low blood sugar
- Your cat doesn't want to eat
- You gave insulin as usual but your cat vomited his food
- You notice a sudden increase in thirst or urination

Your veterinarian may recommend a routine glucose curve every 4-6 weeks, or approximately 7 days after a change in insulin dose.

What is a glucose curve?

This is a series of measurements, generally taken every 2 hours, over the course of a day. If your cat is on a long-lasting insulin, a sample may be taken every 4 hours. Your veterinarian will provide specific instructions and use this information to see if the insulin dose is appropriate.

What is a normal blood glucose concentration?

The healthy glucose concentrations in your cat should be determined by your veterinarian. The targeted glucose range for diabetic cats may be somewhat higher than normal to prevent problems associated with insulin induced hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels).

Should I give more insulin if the glucose is high?

If you suspect hypoglycemia contact your veterinarian. Never increase your cat's insulin dose or give an extra dose unless your veterinarian tells you to do so. If you measure glucose and it's high (this value will be determined by your veterinarian), make a note of the time of day and update your veterinarian. As long as your cat is eating and alert, a high blood sugar level is not an emergency.

What should I do if the glucose is low?

If the glucose is low, (this value will be determined by your veterinarian), offer your cat something to eat immediately. Canned food is a good choice, as it is tasty and contains simple carbohydrates which are quickly absorbed and raise the blood sugar. Recheck the glucose level in 30 minutes, to be sure it's moving up. If your cat is confused or doesn't want to eat, rub syrup over the gums. Your cat may also need intravenous glucose, so call your veterinarian and let them know what's going on.

Should I reduce the insulin dose if the glucose level is below 65 mg/dl¹?

In general, the insulin dose should be decreased when hypoglycemia is confirmed. However, it is important to talk to your veterinarian and get their advice, as every pet is different. Low blood sugar (from too much insulin) is much more dangerous than high sugar levels.

Important points

- At-home glucose monitoring with a device such as the AlphaTRAK[®] Blood Glucose Monitoring System is easy and helps your veterinarian in monitoring your cat's diabetes
- Never increase the insulin dose unless directed to do so by your veterinarian
- Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible if glucose falls below 65 mg/dl¹
- Offer food or rub syrup on the gums if glucose is less than 65 mg/dl¹
- If you suspect hypoglycemia contact your veterinarian
- A high glucose level is not an emergency, but make a note and update your veterinarian within 48 hours
- Regular glucose curves are the best way to assess an insulin dose and decide about dose adjustments
- Always let your veterinarian know if your cat is thirsty, weak, not eating, losing weight or vomiting

Veterinary Clinic Contact Details

Name of Doctor: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Emergency Telephone Number: _____

Note: The health information contained herein is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to replace a discussion with a veterinarian. All decisions regarding patient care must be made with a veterinarian and unique characteristics of each patient should be considered.

¹ Ettinger SJ, Feldman EC. Textbook of Veterinary Internal Medicine. Vol 2. WB Saunders Company. pp 1529-1534. 1995.