

Frequently Asked Questions: Feline Diabetes Mellitus

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What is diabetes mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus is a condition caused by a lack of insulin action, which makes a cat unable to use glucose for energy. This increases weakness, hunger, thirst, and urination.

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How did my cat get this disease?

Diabetes in cats, similar to type 2 diabetes in humans, is often associated with genetics, excess body weight, and a sedentary lifestyle. It is believed that the cat's body first becomes resistant to the effects of insulin and eventually loses the ability to make insulin altogether.

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How do you treat diabetes mellitus?

Most patients are treated with 2 insulin injections per day and changed to a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet, which also helps with weight management.

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How long does treatment last?

Most diabetic cats will require lifelong dietary and insulin therapy. Although early diagnosis and management with insulin and diet change provide the greatest chance of reversing diabetes (termed "diabetic remission"), a patient that has not gone into diabetic remission within 6–10 months of diagnosis will likely always require insulin therapy.

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How do I monitor my diabetic cat's health?

Initially, diabetic patients need regular veterinary monitoring. Your observations of your cat's health in conjunction with blood testing (eg, fructosamine levels, blood glucose curves) help ensure the most effective treatment. While veterinary visits may be more frequent directly after diagnosis, most diabetic cats require visits only every 4–6 months once they are stable.

6

Does diabetes predispose my cat to other health problems?

Diabetic patients have a suppressed immune system and can easily develop secondary infections (commonly, urinary tract infections). They also have a high occurrence of pancreatic inflammation, which can cause gastrointestinal upset and temporary disruption of glucose control. Routine veterinary monitoring helps catch problems early and minimize their impact.

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Do I need to change how I care for my cat?

- Diabetic animals are predisposed to dehydration and should always have access to fresh, clean water.
- The timing of insulin injections should be consistent day-to-day.
- Similarly, the timing and content of meals should be consistent, and small amounts of food should be available at all times.
- High blood glucose (ie, hyperglycemia) is seldom life-threatening, but low blood sugar (ie, hypoglycemia) is an emergency situation. Be familiar with the signs of hypoglycemia (eg, weakness, tremors, twitching, collapse, seizures), and immediately seek veterinary assistance if you see any.