



Feline Diabetes: What You Need to Know

Feline diabetes (diabetes mellitus) is a condition where the body is unable to produce enough insulin to balance blood sugar, or glucose, which is a main source of energy for cats, much like it is in humans. Left untreated through insulin treatment and/or diet changes, cats can become unwell. Risk factors for diabetes in cats include being older, neutered males, obese, and physically inactive; poor or inadequate diet can significantly worsen the condition. With proper nutrition and medical management, including regular check-ups, your foster cat or forever friend cat can live a healthy, happy, normal life.

Signs of Diabetes

- **Weight loss.** To get the energy it needs, the body turns to other sources, like breaking down the body's protein and fats, in order to feed glucose-starved cells. Despite an increased appetite, this can result in sometimes severe weight loss.
- **Excessive thirst and urination.** High levels of glucose in the blood can cause the body to excrete excessive amounts of glucose in the urine. This can lead to increased urinary water loss, which can lead to dehydration, and a compensatory increase in thirst. Urine in diabetic cats can often be pungent.
- **Physical changes.** The cat's eyes may look sunken and blood shot; if diabetes is left untreated it can cause vision loss and even blindness. Cats with prolonged and untreated diabetes may experience damage to the nerves in the hind limbs, which can cause weakness and walking flat on their hind legs, and some cases lead to paralysis.

Managing Diabetes

Insulin therapy and dietary management are the two key treatments for feline diabetes. Many cats respond well to their insulin injections if these are required at your veterinarian's advice. Insulin injections can help to balance out the cat's glucose levels. For cats on insulin, your veterinarian may recommend monitoring their blood glucose every one to three months. In addition, provide your cat with appropriate playtime and enrichment.

Focus on Good Nutrition

Many diabetic cats have previously not been fed a high-quality diet, which can lead to or worsen the condition. With a focus on proper nutrition, many cats may be able to go into partial or full remission. While this is less likely if the cat is older, one or two units of insulin twice a day is much less expensive than five or six units of insulin twice a day, and the cat's overall health is more likely to improve.

Wet food is critical to all cats' overall health, and is especially important for cats with diabetes. A high protein, low carbohydrate wet food is ideal. In addition to higher end foods, Fancy Feast pate specifically has been known to help support diabetic cats. Depending on the cat's weight, they will be eating approximately two to three small (3oz) cans per day, ideally in two servings. For cats that enjoy kibble, fosters and guardians can supplement the mainly wet food diet with a prescription kibble designed for diabetic cats, available through your veterinarian.

For cats that require injections, insulin should be administered just before or after mealtime.

Treats are often high in carbohydrates and should be given sparingly; try freeze dried proteins like chicken or turkey instead of Temptations.

Monitor their Blood Sugar (Glucose) at Home

Keep a diary or log of your cat's changes in appetite, thirst, urination and overall energy level. At the same time, you can monitor their blood sugar. For cats that are in remission (i.e. diabetes is being controlled through diet), consult with your veterinarian about how often your cat should be tested at home or at your veterinary clinic.

To do at-home testing, you will need to use a meter, strips and lancets. Always follow the advice of your veterinarian as each cat's situation is different, but below are some general tips:

- Generally speaking, sugar starts high, drops during the day, and goes back up at night. For this reason, you may be asked to check the glucose one to three times per day at consistent times, since food intake will cause blood sugar to rise. Once the cat is stable/on a measured dose, the frequency of at-home monitoring may reduce.
- Blood sugar readings should be taken from the small blood vessels that go around the edge of the ear. Hold the cat's ear up to a light and you will see them. Use the lancet to prick the ear near one of these blood vessels/veins. Blood sugar readings should be between 3-17 mg/dl.
- If the cat is hypoglycemic (low blood sugar, reading of below 3 mg/dl), feed him/her food right away. Cats that are hypoglycemic will not act normally: they generally do not want to move and will not be as alert or vocal. If the cat becomes hypoglycemic, it may be that the cat is going into remission or that the insulin needs to be adjusted accordingly.
- Speak to your vet about plotting a "glucose curve" for the cat as required. This will involve taking readings every two hours for a full 12-hour period.

If the caregiver themselves are diabetic and use a meter for testing, always use a separate meter for both a person and cat; ideally you will use a veterinary glucometer designed for animals. The cat's readings will generally be much higher so readings should be tracked separately to avoid confusion.

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