

Feline Diabetes Mellitus

Two forms of diabetes can be found in cats. The first, Diabetes Mellitus is the most common and will be the form discussed in this handout. The rarer form is called Diabetes Insipidus, which will not be covered here. Diabetes mellitus is caused by an excessive amount of sugar in your cats blood and a deficiency in insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas. The exact causes of this disease are unknown, but diet, obesity, genetics, age and complications from other illnesses can all lead to diabetes. This disease is more common in dogs and only one in every four hundred cats develops diabetes.

So, how do you know whether or not your pet is developing diabetes? There are signs to look out for! If your cat is drinking an excessive amount of water, has an increased appetite, is urinating more often and seems to be losing weight, then your cat may be developing diabetes. Your veterinarian is able to test for this disease, which will be discussed later on. Before we discuss the treatment of this condition, lets discuss some preventive steps that can be taken to avoid it.

Once your cat has diabetes, this disease will be with him for the remainder of his life. Therefore, it is very important that we take steps to avoid this disease. Although diabetes can be acquired through genetics, which is difficult to avoid, the most common cause of the disease is obesity. It is very important that your cat gets regular exercise and is maintained on a well balanced diet. Your veterinarian can recommend a cat food that is right for your pet and make recommendations for an exercise regiment. Cats that are kept indoors should be encouraged to play in order to maintain a healthy body weight.

If diabetes is suspected, your veterinarian will perform a simple blood test to measure the level of glucose (blood sugar) in your cats blood. Multiple blood glucose tests are often necessary to establish a baseline. If your cats blood glucose level returns high on the first test, this may have just resulted from a recent meal and does not necessarily indicate that your cat has diabetes. If your veterinarian determines that your cat does have diabetes, he or she will want to perform regular blood glucose tests at the veterinary practice to monitor levels. Your veterinarian may also have you monitor your cats blood glucose at home by sending you with an easy to use urine test kit.

Some mild cases of diabetes can be treated with a strict diet that is low in carbohydrates and high in protein. However, many cases will require your cat to be on insulin therapy. An oral form of insulin is available for humans, however, this is not effective in pets and an injectable form must be used. Your veterinarian will determine the proper type of insulin for your cat and the specific dose. This dose may be changed several times during the first few weeks of insulin therapy in order to properly regulate your pets blood glucose levels.

A member of the veterinary staff will instruct you on how to administer an insulin injection, which is given subcutaneously (below the skin). It is very important to follow your veterinarians exact dosage as an overdose of insulin can cause dangerously low blood sugars. If you ever feel that your pet has received too much insulin, you should contact your veterinarian or local

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emergency pet hospital if it is after hours. Corn syrup or honey can be given to quickly increase your cats blood sugar levels if an overdose is suspected. Patients that have overdosed on insulin tend to become very lethargic, unsteady, develop shaking and in severe cases convulsions can occur.

If your cat is insulin-dependent, it is important that he receives a diet high in protein and low in carbohydrates. He should be fed at the same time everyday and insulin should be given at mealtimes as directed by your veterinarian. Maintaining a healthy weight is very important for the diabetic pet, so regular exercise is a must. Cats that have been diagnosed with Diabetes Mellitus can be effectively treated with insulin therapy and can lead healthy, normal lives.

