

Could your dog or cat be living with diabetes?



Information on common
signs and risk factors.


petdiabetes
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What is diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus, the medical name for diabetes, is a disease caused by a lack of insulin that affects the level of glucose, or sugar, in your dog or cat's blood. The glucose comes from the food that your pet eats. The food is broken down into very small components by the digestive system so that the body can use it for energy. Glucose is one of these components, and an important source of energy.

Glucose is absorbed from the intestines into the bloodstream where it travels to cells throughout the body. Insulin is required for the cells to absorb glucose. Insulin is produced by the pancreas in response to the amount of glucose in the bloodstream. Healthy pets produce insulin easily, but pets with diabetes don't. In canine and feline diabetes, unused glucose builds up in the bloodstream.



Is diabetes in my pet the same as diabetes in people?

The two conditions are very similar. In fact, your veterinarian will be using medication, equipment, and monitoring systems that are similar to those used for diabetic people.

How common is diabetes in dogs and cats?

Diabetes is reported to affect anywhere between 1 in 100 to 1 in 500 dogs and cats. But experts believe that this disease is on the rise.

Can diabetes lead to other health problems?

Yes. Dogs and cats with diabetes can develop other health problems, usually after living with diabetes for a year or more.

For dogs, the most common complication of diabetes is **cataract formation**. Persistently high blood glucose levels make the lens of the eye become opaque, causing blindness.

For cats, **weakness of the hind legs** is a common complication. Persistently high blood glucose levels may damage nerves, causing weakness and muscle wasting.

For both dogs and cats, avoiding high blood glucose levels should help prevent or delay these complications. For this reason, early diagnosis of diabetes in your dog or cat is especially important.

Will diabetes affect my dog or cat's life expectancy?

Today, with effective treatment and monitoring, a diabetic dog or cat should have the same life expectancy as a non-diabetic dog or cat. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment help diabetic pets maintain a good quality of life.

Is my dog or cat at risk of diabetes?

While diabetes has been diagnosed in dogs and cats of all ages, genders, and breeds, certain pets are at greater risk of the disease.

Risk factors in dogs

- Age (middle-aged to older dogs are more affected)
- Unspayed females
- Genetics
- Obesity
- Breed—these breeds have a higher risk of developing diabetes:
 - Cocker Spaniels
 - Dachshunds
 - Dobermann Pinschers
 - German Shepherds
 - Golden Retrievers
 - Labrador Retrievers
 - Pomeranians
 - Terriers
 - Toy Poodles



Risk factors in cats

- Age (older cats are more susceptible)
- Neutered males
- Genetics
- Other disorders or diseases, which can cause insulin reduction or resistance such as chronic pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) or hyperthyroidism (overproduction of thyroid hormones)
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity



Are there warning signs I should be aware of?

Some common signs of diabetes in dogs and cats include:

- Excessive thirst
- Excessive urination—your pet produces more urine per day and may have “accidents” in the house (dogs) or outside the litterbox (cats)
- Excessive hunger while losing weight
- Lethargy (less active/sleeps more)
- Cloudy eyes (dogs)
- Doesn’t groom (cats)
- Thinning, dry, and dull hair



How will my veterinarian test my pet for diabetes?

Your veterinarian may begin by performing a general health examination and asking questions about any signs your pet may be displaying. Then, a sample of your pet's urine will be tested for the presence of glucose or ketones (acids produced by the body as it breaks down fat instead of glucose for energy). If glucose is present in your pet's urine, your veterinarian will then test your pet's blood to determine the blood glucose level. A diabetes diagnosis is considered definite when persistently high glucose levels are found in *both* the blood and urine.

How do I take care of a pet with diabetes?

Although there is no cure for diabetes, the disease can be successfully managed with the help of your veterinarian. **Daily insulin injections** are usually required to restore your pet's insulin level and control their blood glucose levels. Many owners are anxious about giving injections, but it's easier than you think, and you'll quickly learn how to handle the dosing routine with little stress for you or your pet. **Diet** plays a vital role in helping to keep your pet's diabetes regulated.

Your veterinarian can recommend a diet that's best suited to the needs of your pet. A high-quality, consistent source of protein is an essential part of any diabetic diet.

High-protein, low-carbohydrate foods are currently recommended for diabetic cats because they provide the extra energy cats need to get them through their active days, without the extra carbs that can turn into excess sugar. It is important to feed your pet based on its ideal body weight.

Consistent timing and size of meals is also very important. **Exercise** can help dogs with diabetes, but it needs to be regulated because activity affects blood glucose levels. It's best to create a consistent exercise routine for your diabetic dog and stick to it. (There is no clear recommendation for exercise in diabetic cats because their activity is difficult to regulate.) **Frequent veterinary checkups** can help identify changes in your pet's condition and help you to manage this disease successfully over time.

Managing your dog or cat's diabetes will require some effort, but the rewards are well worth it. Pets whose diabetes is under control have normal thirst, appetite, urination, and activity levels. Their weight is generally stable and they are less likely to develop complications.

Where can I learn more about diabetes in dogs and cats?

The following websites provide useful information:

- www.petdiabetesmonth.com
- www.pet-diabetes.com
- www.caninsulin.com

Is your dog or cat experiencing any of these signs?

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Increased hunger while losing weight
- Lower activity
- Thinning, dry, or dull hair

If so, talk to your veterinarian about getting your pet screened for diabetes. With proper management and monitoring, a dog or cat with diabetes can lead a healthy, happy, and active life.



Intervet International bv,
P.O. Box 31,
5830 AA Boxmeer,
The Netherlands,
Phone +31 (0)485 587600,
Fax +31 (0)485 577333,
E-mail info@merck.com,
www.msd-animal-health.com

