

FACTSHEET

Feline Diabetes

Feline Diabetes, *Diabetes mellitus*, also known as ‘sugar’ diabetes, is a common health problem in cats that affects the control of blood sugar levels in the cat’s blood stream. The disorder usually occurs in middle-aged and older cats, particularly if they are overweight.

Causes of feline diabetes

Feline diabetes can affect cats of any age, sex, or breed. The disorder is more common in overweight male cats over six years old. The causes are unknown although poor nutrition as a kitten, genetics, obesity, hormonal imbalances and certain medications can all be factors. Weight management in cats is very important but if your cat is overweight, it is important that they do not lose weight too quickly, as this can lead to other health problems. Talk to your vet if you are concerned about your cat’s weight.

Signs of feline diabetes

Warning signs for feline diabetes can be similar to other feline diseases, so it is very important to see your vet if you notice any of the following:

- Increased thirst
- Passing more urine
- Weight loss
- Weakness/lethargy
- Vomiting
- Increased appetite
- Frequent infections, e.g. skin or urinary tract
- Poor coat condition
- Fits or seizures

How feline diabetes affects your cat

When your cat is healthy the food they eat is digested into the bloodstream. Insulin is secreted by the body to signal the cells to begin converting sugars from the food into usable energy, or glucose.

If the cat is diabetic, their body will either not produce enough insulin, or won’t respond to it. This will lead to abnormal levels of sugars in the bloodstream which cannot be used by the body.

Initially the cat may gain weight but as the disorder progresses the cat will lose weight as the body tries to process the sugars. Even if the diabetic cat seems to be eating well, an untreated cat will starve to death.

An early warning sign of feline diabetes is excessive urination. This is caused by the body trying to pass the excess sugar from the blood stream.

Treatment of feline diabetes

If diagnosed in the early stages this disorder is very treatable. It is therefore very important to see a vet as soon as you notice any warning signs.

Depending on the severity of the disorder there are a number of ways feline diabetes can be treated.

- **Insulin:** the most common form of treatment for feline diabetes. Prescribed dosages of insulin are given to your cat daily by injection. Some cats are treated twice a day. Usually your cat will require these injections for the rest of their life, but some cats when treated early will stabilise and may become non-diabetic again. You may be required to administer the injections or your vet may do it for you if other tests need to be done at the same time. Regular urine tests are needed to monitor your cat's blood sugar levels.
- **Oral medication:** a small percentage of cats respond well to oral drugs, which lower blood sugar levels. This is most effective with a weight management diet.
- **Diet:** it is essential that a diabetic cat receives a consistent diet every day. Your vet may prescribe a specific veterinary blend food to manage the diabetes and in the case of overweight cats, this will include a weight management plan. Weight loss may cause the diabetes to resolve.
- **Routine:** if your cat is diagnosed with diabetes it is very important that you establish a strict routine for your cat and every member of your household abides by it. Your cat's life may depend on it. Feeding and medication times need to be the same every day and exercise times need to be monitored. The key to successfully treating this disorder is consistency. Any changes in your cat should be reported immediately to your vet.

The future for your diabetic cat

Feline diabetes is a common and treatable disorder. If your cat is diagnosed with feline diabetes this doesn't mean a death sentence; thousands of cats around the world are diagnosed each year with feline diabetes and live long, happy lives. Providing you are willing to give your cat all the necessary care they need, there is no reason why your diabetic cat cannot continue to enjoy a happy life with your family.

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