

Diabetes Mellitus in Dogs

Diabetes Mellitus, typically just called diabetes, is caused by a deficiency of insulin that results in the body being unable to properly use glucose. This results in blood sugar levels that are much higher than normal, which leads to several problems. The most common early changes that owners notice include weight loss, increased appetite, and increased drinking and urination. Later changes include sluggishness, vomiting, and cataracts.

There are two types of diabetes mellitus. In type I, the pancreas does not produce enough insulin. Type II occurs when the body becomes unable to use insulin properly. Almost all dogs with diabetes have type I. This is a lifelong disorder in dogs and requires management for the remainder of the patient’s life.

Causes of diabetes can include genetic susceptibility, infectious diseases, immune system abnormalities that affect the pancreas, pancreatitis, certain medications, and other hormonal diseases. Overweight animals and unspayed females are also at higher risk. It typically occurs in middle-aged to older animals. Any breed can be affected, although the Keeshond, Puli, Miniature Pinscher, Cairn Terrier, Poodle, Dachshund, Miniature Schnauzer, and Beagle are breeds with higher risks. Females are more commonly affected than males.

Diabetes can be serious and life-threatening if left untreated. However, most animals that are diagnosed and treated properly and that respond well to treatment can live a normal or near-normal life span with a good quality of life.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis of the disease will include at least a physical exam, discussion of the signs you are seeing at home, bloodwork, and possibly a urinalysis. Once diagnosed, we will establish a treatment plan for your pet.

Treatment:

Our treatment protocol often begins with a food change. We will recommend a prescription diet that is low in “simple sugars” and higher in “complex carbs” such as fiber. Complex carbs take longer to digest than simple sugars, which will help to avoid highs and lows in blood sugar. Be sure to change food over the course of about a week to avoid causing GI problems such as diarrhea. We will also have you switch from any regular treats to Purina Lite Snackers, which are very low in calories and will be less likely to cause blood sugar problems than regular treats. Do not feed anything else if possible! If your pet does get something else, be sure to inform your veterinarian.

A couple of weeks after the food change, we will have you bring your pet back to recheck bloodwork and see how well the blood sugar level is being controlled with the diet change alone. At this point, we will determine whether or not your pet needs insulin injections. Most animals will require insulin injections, but the prescription food can help to keep the dosage as low as possible.

Your pet will need to continue to come back for bloodwork every 2-3 weeks until their appropriate insulin dose is found. Every patient is different. There is no specific dose that can be used for every patient, so we will start with a relatively low dose and gradually work up to whatever dose manages your pet’s blood sugar adequately. These rechecks and dose changes are extremely important in long-term management of the disease!

***Monitoring:***

Once treatment has begun, continue to monitor any signs you had been seeing, such as increased drinking and urination, weight loss, and increased appetite. Inform your veterinarian of any changes in these behaviors at each visit.

After your pet’s insulin dose has been optimized, we will continue to monitor with glucose checks every few months. Insulin needs can change over time, so by monitoring, we can continue to adjust dosing as needed.

Please contact us at 319-837-6511 if you have any questions or concerns throughout the management of your pet’s diabetes.