

ORAH Info:

My cat has diabetes mellitus-- Now What?



Overweight cats are much more likely to develop this disease as are cats with a history of pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas, the organ where insulin is made). Symptoms may first appear or may worsen when pets go through periods of stress.

WHAT IS DIABETES MELLITUS ?

Cats' bodies are powered by glucose (a sugar), which they get from the food they eat. The hormone insulin is needed to get the glucose into the body's cells. In cats with diabetes, there is not enough insulin in the cat's bloodstream, or the cells have stopped responding to the insulin. Because of this, the glucose stays in the bloodstream and the body must find energy by breaking down fats and other tissue.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DIABETES?

The hallmark symptoms of diabetes are: increased thirst and increased urination, weight loss in spite of increased or normal appetite, and listlessness. Urinary and neurologic disorders can result from untreated diabetes. Sometimes cats with diabetes seem normal or nearly so; other times they can get really sick before they are diagnosed.

WHY DO SOME CATS GET SO SICK FROM DIABETES?

Most pets can handle high blood sugar levels for some time. However, using fats as an alternative fuel source can lead to severe changes in the acidity of the blood as byproducts of fat breakdown, called ketones, are formed. A cat with diabetic ketoacidosis requires intensive care and hospitalization to survive this crisis.

HOW IS DIABETES TREATED? CAN DIABETES EVER GO AWAY?

In some cats with early or mild diabetes, treatment can start with weight loss and diet change. Recent studies have shown that many cats are more likely to go into remission (to stop being diabetic) if treated with insulin injections as well. Cats with other health problems, such as poor dental health or other diseases, often need additional treatments to stabilize their blood sugar levels. Getting to a healthy weight is extremely important. Most cats respond very well to treatment, and many cats actually return to a normal, non-diabetic state.

In most cases, insulin injections are given twice daily. Cats under treatment with insulin do not require the intensive hour-to-hour glucose control that is typical in human medicine, but since their insulin requirements may decrease over time, it is important to watch closely for signs of low blood sugar (described below) which can show that this is happening.

TREATMENT BASICS:

Only give the insulin injection if your cat eats. Giving insulin to a cat who has not eaten can cause the blood glucose to go too low, which is more dangerous than the glucose staying too high for a short period of time. For this same reason, if you make a mistake during the injection or are unsure if you or someone else in the household already gave the insulin, do not give another dose.

Insulin must be kept refrigerated. Before drawing up the insulin dose, gently rock the insulin bottle to re-suspend the insulin crystals in the solution. Do not shake the insulin as this breaks the crystals and decreases the insulin's strength.

Signs of low blood glucose include: weakness, pacing and staring, seeming dazed or confused, seizures, and extreme lethargy. If any of these occur, give your pet a few tablespoons of corn syrup to bring the blood glucose up quickly. If your cat is very "out-of-it," you can smear this on her gums. If she is alert enough, feed a small meal. Consult with a veterinarian before giving the next dose of insulin. If your cat is not rapidly improving, seek emergency care.

Help keep your diabetic cat healthy with regular rechecks with the veterinarian. Diabetics' needs can change over time, requiring adjustment of the insulin dosage. Once your cat is regulated well, re-evaluations are needed much less often.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

There can be helpful information on the internet about managing a diabetic cat. There are also sites that have inaccurate information, sometimes based on personal stories that do not apply to most cats. The best sites are listed on our website (www.onionriveranimalhospital.com) and include:

www.petdiabetes.org

www.felinediabetes.org

