

What is diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic and a potentially debilitating condition that affects cats and dogs. When a pet has diabetes mellitus, their pancreas does not produce adequate amounts of insulin. A vital hormone, insulin enables a body's cells to use glucose, or sugar. Your veterinarian may not know why your dog or cat has diabetes mellitus, but some of the common risk factors include:

- Obesity
- Genetics
- Pancreatitis, or other hormone abnormalities

What are early signs of diabetes?

Excessive urination and thirst: When your pet has a high concentration of glucose in their blood, their kidneys must work harder to process it. When the kidneys become overwhelmed, the excess glucose is excreted into the urine. This leads to frequent urination, which in turn can cause dehydration. Your pet will drink more to hydrate themselves; and then they will need to urinate more. It's a vicious cycle.

Increased appetite with weight loss: When your pet has diabetes, their cells can no longer efficiently absorb the glucose in their blood. As a result, starved cells will trigger the breakdown of available fats and proteins as an alternative source of energy. Your pet loses weight and their appetite increases. Diabetes is diagnosed by the detection of increased blood glucose (sugar) levels and glucose in the urine.

How is diabetes treated?

In the majority of pets, treatment of diabetes requires an injection of insulin under the skin twice daily. The injections are made with a very small insulin syringe and are generally painless to the pet. Veterinarians or technicians will teach pet owners how to give the injections. Owners typically find these injections easy to perform, according to SAGE Internal Medicine veterinarians.

Veterinarians will recommend a low dose of insulin to start—this will prevent episodes of low blood sugar. Your veterinarian will monitor the insulin dose closely and increase it slowly every 7-14 days until the right dose is reached to control your pet's disease. Monitoring is done with glucose curves and/or fructosamine values. Glucose curve visits require your pet to spend 8-10 hours in the hospital so we can monitor multiple blood sugars throughout the day. The goal of this test is to see how low their blood sugar gets during the day as well as to ensure their blood sugars are within a targeted range. Once your pet is on a stable insulin dose, these visits will be less frequent. In many cases, once a pet is regulated they may only require a visit every 3-4 months.