

Management of Diabetes Mellitus in Cats

What is diabetes Mellitus:

Diabetes refers to a medical condition where there is an excessive quantity of glucose in the blood. This is caused by a deficiency in the hormone insulin which is secreted by the pancreas.

Clinical signs:

- Increased drinking and urination- otherwise known as polyuria and polydipsia
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Increased appetite
- Less commonly: weakness, plantigrade stance, depression and inappetence

Risk factors:

- Obesity
- Increasing age- over 7 years old most commonly
- Breed – Burmese cats more common
- Physical inactivity
- Some drug administration such as glucocorticoids.

Diagnosis:

Diabetes diagnosis is made by finding a persistently high glucose level in the blood as well as glucose in the urine together with appropriate clinical signs. Cats can get increased glucose levels in the blood from stress which sometimes makes diagnosis more complicated and can take multiple tests to confirm diagnosis.

Treatment:

Diabetes is a treatable condition, however does require a long-term commitment. The overall goal of treatment is to limit or eliminate the cats' clinical signs while avoiding insulin-induced hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar levels) and other complications.

The main method of treatment is by twice daily insulin injections under the skin. Insulin doses are best given either when the cat is distracted through eating or just after a meal and should aim to be given as close to 12 hours apart as practical.

Hypoglycaemia:

Hypoglycaemia can be life-threatening and needs rapid treatment. Signs include seizures, recumbency, anorexia, tremors, vomiting, ataxia and lethargy. Treatment should be given promptly by application of honey or glucose to the gums and seek veterinary advice immediately.

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Diabetic remission:

Some cats can go into remission after appropriate management and therefore be able to be tapered off of insulin over time. Change in insulin doses should only ever occur under veterinary advice.

After remission cats should remain on a diabetic diet and monitored for reoccurrence of clinical signs.

Diet:

Obesity is associated with insulin resistance and can be a cause of diabetes. Therefore, managed weight loss to aim for a normal body weight and body condition is advised.

An optimum diet for a diabetic cat has restricted carbohydrates, high quality protein and lower in fat. There are two main diabetic diets on the market: Hills Prescription w/d and Royal Canin Diabetic which are recommended for all cats after diagnosis of diabetes. Research has shown that cats with appropriate insulin treatment alongside adequate diet are the most likely to go into diabetic remission.

Diet must be consistent and aim to feed half the food morning and night and keep quantity stable each day.

Monitoring:

In the initial few months post diagnosis your cat will require frequent visits to check levels. As discussed earlier, some cats will get an elevation in glucose level when in hospital due to stress so each management plan will be slightly different.

- Daily overall wellbeing: demeanour and activity levels
- Daily water intake: reduction or normalisation of daily water intake indicates adequate control.
- Daily urine production
- Daily feeding: amount and type of food offered and amount eaten.
- Daily insulin administration: time and dose.
- Weekly bodyweight and body condition
- Blood glucose curves: Measures blood glucose levels every 1-3 hours depending on the cat to determine the blood glucose levels throughout the day. This may be performed in hospital however if your cat gets stressed easily, your veterinarian may wish to teach you how to perform blood glucose readings yourself at home.
- Spot blood glucose readings: if you are concerned about your cat's behaviour.
- Blood glucose readings prior to insulin dosing can also be done.
- Urine glucose readings: urine glucose should be monitored weekly using a urine dipstick.

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