

Pawsitive Press

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Diabetes 1
- Diabetes Continued 2
- Vets First Choice 3
- Coupons 4

Related Webpages:



Pet Diabetes Awareness



Diabetes

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Diabetes mellitus is one disease in veterinary medicine that is also a common problem with people. This happens when the pancreas is unable to make enough insulin or the body is not using the insulin properly. This article will define diabetes mellitus, discuss insulin and why it is important, what signs are seen in pets with diabetes and discuss differences in dogs and cats.

What is Diabetes Mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus is when the amount of sugar or glucose in the blood is consistently too high. This causes many problems for the body and is a life threatening disease. Diabetes mellitus in people can be classified as type I (juvenile onset or insulin dependent) or type II (adult onset and non-insulin dependent). Type I diabetes mellitus is caused when the pancreas is unable to make enough insulin. This type of diabetes is treated by administering insulin. Type



II diabetes mellitus may be caused when the body is unable to utilize the insulin in the blood stream. This is called insulin resistance. This often occurs in people and pets with obesity. This type of diabetes in people and cats may respond well to exercise and diet change, especially when coupled with weight loss.

What does Insulin do and why is it important?

Every cell in the body likes to use glucose or sugar as an energy source. In fact, the only energy source the brain can use is glucose. Other tissues, such as muscles, can break down proteins for energy but still need and would like to use glucose. Insulin is a hormone made by cells in the pancreas. This hormone allows cells in the body to take glucose from the blood and use it. The pancreas releases insulin in response to the presence of glucose in the

blood. Certain foods can cause big insulin responses like refined sugars. With insulin, the body pulls glucose from the blood and lets it into the cells to be used to fuel and repair the cells. The only organ in the body that does not require insulin to use glucose is the brain.

If the body does not have enough insulin or the cells do not respond to insulin (insulin resistance) glucose or sugar increases in the blood. This is diabetes mellitus.

It seems to me that my pet is drinking more water, what could be wrong?

A person with diabetes mellitus that is not controlled will tell you that they are thirsty all the time. The same is true for pets with this disease. Dogs can be really thirsty after going outside or after playing ball for a while, but this type of thirst is satisfied quickly and the behavior stops. Many cat owners rarely see their pet drink, because cat's kidneys work really well and they don't typically need to drink large volumes of water. Thirst from diabetes is never satisfied and pets will continue to drink even after

Diabetes Continued

a large intake of water. Owners are very perceptive about how much their pet is drinking because they have to refill the water more frequently than normal. Cat owners will say that they are cleaning the litter pan out much more frequently; it is “flooded”! There are other diseases which can cause pets to drink more water than normal: kidney problems, bladder infections, hormonal problems, liver problems or pituitary problems. Lab work and a urinalysis usually suffice to define the problem. Owners usually bring their pets in for drinking more water, weight loss or urinating more than normal. Diabetes mellitus in cats and dogs often results in increased water consumption, ravenous appetite, increased urination and sometimes decreased energy levels.

Is there a difference in diabetes between dogs and cats?

Obesity in dogs and cats is a common factor which often precedes diabetes in both dogs and cats, but dogs and cats do have important differences in this disease. Dogs will generally have insulin dependent diabetes which is similar to type I diabetes in people. In cats, diabetes tend to be more like type II diabetes or insulin resistant diabetes.

If my pet has diabetes how do I treat it?

Diabetes is not a curable disease. The pancreas is unable to produce enough insulin to help lower the blood sugar (glucose).

Treatment for diabetes is life long and usually involves two things, changing the diet and giving insulin shots at home. Many clients are hesitant to give their pets injections, but after some training from your family veterinarian become comfortable with the procedure.

Diet changes usually involve changing to foods with decreased fat and increased fiber. Most times a blood glucose curve is run at the hospital to actually see how the glucose level is responding to the insulin. There are many different types of food and insulin combinations that your veterinarian can prescribe for diabetes. Each pet is different so it must be an individualized plan. Even though cats tend to have diabetes more like type II diabetes in people, insulin is still an important part of their treatment. Some cats may however, if diagnosed early, respond to diet change and insulin and go into remission (no clinical signs and no insulin shots needed) early in the disease.

Diabetic pets may require more support from owners and veterinarians and become higher maintenance but they can enjoy long and happy lives with the proper care. So if your pet is drinking more than normal

for two or three days, there usually is something wrong but your veterinarian can usually help a great deal.

If you have any questions regarding diagnosis or treatment for diabetes please feel free to contact us or your regular veterinarian. We are always happy to help!



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