

Aireworth Vets 
SMALL ANIMAL

FELINE DIABETES



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!

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What is diabetes mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus refers to a medical condition where there is an excessive quantity of sugar (glucose) in the blood. This is caused by a deficiency of the hormone insulin, which keeps blood sugar at an optimum level.

The clinical signs seen in diabetes are largely a consequence of the raised concentrations of glucose in the blood, and the inability of the body to use glucose as an energy source (due to the deficiency of insulin).

Diabetes mellitus is an uncommon disease in cats, but is being recognised more frequently in older pets. It is more common in males than females, and obese cats are more at risk of developing it. Some other diseases can cause Diabetes, so your vet will need to check your cat isn't suffering from anything else.



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What clinical signs do you see in diabetes mellitus?

The most common clinical signs seen in diabetic patients are an increase in the volume of urine that is produced and, to compensate for this, an increase in the amount of water that is drunk. Weight loss is also a common feature, and an increase in appetite may be noticed in some cats. If the condition is left untreated, liver disease, problems walking, or other illnesses may develop. If the early signs are missed, more serious signs such as vomiting and depression may develop. If diabetes is left untreated for weeks or months your pet could go into a coma and die.

How is diabetes mellitus diagnosed?

The diagnosis of diabetes mellitus is made by finding appropriate clinical signs, together with a persistently elevated blood glucose concentration and the presence of glucose in the urine. However, a diagnosis of diabetes cannot usually be made on a single blood and urine sample as other conditions, and in particular stress, may also cause a transient rise in glucose levels. Confirmation of diabetes may therefore require more than one blood sample collected over a period of time (perhaps several days), or special blood tests that average out the blood glucose level obtained over several weeks.

How is diabetes mellitus treated?

The good news is that the majority of diabetic animals can now be treated and may live normal, happy lives, if you are prepared to invest time and money into their care. Although long-term treatment does require commitment, it can be very rewarding to successfully manage this condition.

Initial steps in treating a diabetic cat may involve removal of any predisposing causes for the diabetes. If there are no predisposing causes, or if correction of the predisposing causes does not lead to resolution of the diabetes, specific treatment is required. Although a small proportion of cats will respond to a form of tablet ('oral hypoglycaemic') designed to increase the amount of insulin produced by the pancreas and increase its effectiveness, most cats will require insulin supplementation in the form of injections to control their diabetes. However this may only be a temporary requirement, and some cats, having been on insulin for a period, do not require it again, or require it intermittently.

During the initial stages of treatment, it is common for a cat to be hospitalised at a veterinary surgery so that appropriate monitoring can be carried out while a suitable dosage and preparation of insulin is being determined. Some vets prefer to stabilise cats on an outpatient basis. Once a cat has been stabilised (which usually takes a few days to a week or so), treatment can be continued at home. For most cats, this involves a twice daily injection of a small dose of insulin. Very small needles are available for this which cause no pain to the cat, and within a short period of time the procedure becomes very routine.

Although you may be worried about giving your cat injections, most owners find, that with practice, it is easier to give their cat an injection than a tablet. Your vet will teach you how to give injections, and until you are confident we will see you every day at the clinic to help you. Special prescription diets are also available to help control Diabetes mellitus.

Do treated cats need to be monitored?

Yes, it is important to monitor treatment to make sure it is working properly, and to determine if any adjustments are necessary to the dose of insulin given, and whether insulin can be stopped. Monitoring can be done in part through collection of blood samples by your veterinary surgeon, and through urine samples collected at home, as well as health checks and weight records. It is also valuable to keep accurate records of :

- Time of insulin injection
- Amount of insulin injected
- Amount of food fed and eaten (and time)
- Amount of water drunk

If you have any queries or would like to know more, please don't hesitate to ask