

Care of Diabetic Cats

The optimum treatment of a diabetic cat consists of three main components:

- Diet (low in carbohydrates, preferably not dry)
- Home testing (testing of blood sugar levels using a glucometer)
- Insulin injections (using a long-lasting insulin)

For more information, please visit
www.felineoutreach.org.



Feline Outreach Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the care of companion animals, specifically cats.

The information contained is for general informational purposes only, and is no substitute for your own research or the advice of a veterinarian.

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Sugar Cats



Treatment of Feline Diabetes Mellitus





Diet

Feeding your cat is key in properly managing his or her blood sugar levels. Carbohydrates cause rapid rises in blood glucose, followed by rapid declines. This roller coaster effect leaves the body craving more carbohydrates to stop the ill feeling of low blood sugar. (Think of how eating a candy bar may provide you with an immediate burst of energy, followed by a sluggish feeling and a craving for more sugar.)

Cats, as strict carnivores, are less equipped to deal with carbohydrates than human are. The best diet for a diabetic cat (and non-diabetics, for that matter) is one low in carbohydrates. Fortunately, most readily available canned foods fit that bill nicely! Simply read the ingredients and look for a canned food that does not contain carbohydrates such as corn, rice, etc.

The “low carbohydrate” dry foods are much less effective at managing diabetes than wet foods like canned. The high heat processing necessary to produce kibble causes it to be highly glycemic. In addition, some form of starch (corn, rice, potatoes, etc.) is necessary in order to create dry food, so dry foods, even low-carbohydrate versions, are naturally higher in carbohydrates than wet food.

Home Testing

You can test your cat’s blood sugar at home, using the same glucose meter human diabetics do. The meters are available over-the-counter at any drugstore. Simply use the lancet pen (or you can use the lancet without the pen, if you prefer) to poke your cat’s ear to get a small droplet of blood.

Most cats don’t mind this form of testing. It’s generally less stressful than pilling or trimming claws. The test can give you a good picture of your cat’s blood sugar levels at home, without the stress and expense of a vet visit.

It’s also important to test for ketones, especially if blood glucose values are high, an infection is present, or the cat is not eating well. Urine test strips that check for ketones (or ketones and glucose) are available at most drugstores. Ketones can quickly develop into diabetic ketoacidosis, a life-threatening condition. If your cat tests positive for ketones, please consult a veterinarian immediately. Ketoacidosis is generally treated with sub-q fluids and insulin.

Insulin

Many diabetic cats require insulin injections, two or more times daily. Many only need them temporarily, and once a proper diet is fed and normal blood sugar levels achieved with insulin, their pancreas will resume activity on its own.

Cats metabolize very quickly, about twice as fast as humans or dogs, so a long-lasting insulin is best. PZI, Lantus (Glargine), or Levimer are all reasonable choices. Shorter-acting insulin such as Humulin N or Vetsulin (Caninsulin) generally don’t provide enough duration for cats, and only manage their blood sugar for 6 to 8 hours.

Finally

There has been much research in the area of feline diabetes in the past few years. Several advances have been made, and some studies show success rates (cats off insulin entirely) of 60% to 80% on a low-carbohydrate canned diet and after temporary administration of insulin.

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