

Cat Diabetes Warning Signs

Learn the signs to tell if your cat might be affected, plus treatment options.

November marks the human observance of American Diabetes Month. While the disease afflicts humans, there's also a cat diabetes ailment as well.

Similar to the human version of the disease, cat diabetes is caused by the inability of a hormone called insulin to properly balance blood sugar levels, known as glucose, in the body.

After food is digested, glucose enters the blood stream and, in a healthy cat, is then processed into energy. Insulin is the chemical that signals the cells to begin converting the sugars into usable energy.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the cat's pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body's cells don't respond well to insulin. Both result in high blood sugar levels because the body is unable to process the available glucose.

The exact cause of diabetes in cats is unknown, although many factors, such as genetics and obesity, are considered by many veterinarians to be likely factors.

Among the symptoms of feline diabetes are:

- Increased urine production
- Increased thirst, which is a byproduct of more frequent urination
- Weight loss, despite a healthy or voracious appetite
- Lethargy
- Depression

Not all cats will have each symptom, but most diabetic cats will have at least two, according to veterinarians.

In the earlier stages of the disease, cats remain active and alert with few symptoms. However, as the disease progresses, more systems, such as poor skin and coat, liver disease and secondary bacterial infections can become more common. Another, less common symptom is a progressive weakness in the back legs.

Although diabetes can be a debilitating condition, it can be treated. Proper treatment is based on the severity of the disorder, but cats who are not seriously ill usually can be given daily insulin injections and control the disease with a special diet.

For more on feline diabetes and treatment options, contact your veterinarian.