

New Hope for Diabetic Cats

Advances in veterinary medicine will help owners provide better care for cats with diabetes.

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The future of feline diabetes looks promising. As research into the development of new prescription diets, new types of insulin, home monitoring devices, oral medications and ideal feeding schedules moves forward, management of this frustrating disease should become less of a headache for veterinarians and cat owners.

Diabetes in Cats

Feline diabetes is a common glandular disorder estimated to affect 1 in 300 cats. Diabetes occurs from a decrease in insulin secretion from the pancreas and/or a decrease in the action of insulin, which is a hormone required for metabolizing carbohydrates.

There are basically two types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is comparable to insulin-dependent diabetes in humans; the body does not produce adequate amounts of insulin, and treatment requires insulin injections. Type 2 diabetes resembles non-insulin-dependent diabetes in humans; the body may secrete insulin but does it abnormally, and the tissues may not recognize the insulin. Cats with type 2 diabetes can sometimes be managed with oral medication and dietary therapy, but as the disorder progresses, insulin deficiency occurs, and insulin injections are ultimately required.

Currently, there is no reliable way to determine whether a cat is a type 1 or type 2 diabetic. Some experts think that type 2 diabetes is more common in cats than type 1, but the true incidence remains unknown.

Necessary Action

Though all cats are at risk for diabetes, middle-aged and older males are more susceptible. Purebred cats tend to be at decreased risk for diabetes, except for the Burmese, which is four times more likely to be stricken with diabetes.

The classic clinical signs of diabetes include excessive thirst and urination, extremely good appetite and weight loss. Some cats also exhibit neurological dysfunction in their rear legs.