

Beware of Diabetes - Info from AAHA

[http://www.healthypet.com/PetCare/PetsMatter/ReadMore.aspx?volume=November_December&title=Beware_Diabetes&type=NA]

By Stacey Oke, DVM, MSC

Diabetes is an endocrine (glandular) disorder in which animals either do not produce insulin or are unable to respond to its effects. As a result, there is too much sugar in the bloodstream, which can damage the kidneys, eyes, skin, and cardiovascular and nervous systems.

Diabetes is one of the most common endocrine disorders in cats and dogs. Although it is treatable, diabetes is a major health concern that ultimately decreases the lifespan of affected animals.

Nature vs. Nurture: Who is at Risk for Diabetes?

There is little we can do to control some risk factors for diabetes (see sidebar), but we can control obesity—a well-known risk factor. However, we don't seem to really have control because 50% of dogs and cats between 5 and 10 years of age are obese.

What's Wrong with Being Overweight?

"The lifespan of overweight dogs is about 15% shorter than leaner dogs, and overweight dogs suffer from a variety of disorders and chronic health problems, such as osteoarthritis," explains Dorothy Laflamme, DVM, PhD, DACVN, a board-certified nutrition specialist from Nestle Purina PetCare Research in St. Louis, Mo.

Specific to diabetes, "Overweight or obese cats are two to four times more likely to develop diabetes than cats with a healthy body weight," reports Laflamme. According to Laflamme, both pet nutritional and owner behavioral modifications are needed for weight loss. The latter involves increasing interactive exercise levels with your pet (to enjoy non-food-related activities) and measuring the food given to your pet.

Risk Factor	Details/Examples
Age	Middle-aged dogs and cats
Genetics	Australian terrier, beagle, Samoyed, keeshond, and Burmese breeds
Other diseases	Insulin resistance due to obesity and other endocrine disorders (e.g., Cushing's syndrome)
Medications	Steroids, progestins

Check List for Diabetes Prevention

Diabetes is a sneaky disease. The signs develop slowly and can easily be missed if one were not actively looking for them. This Diabetes Awareness Month (November), owners are encouraged to consider the following tips to help prevent diabetes, rather than trying to treat the condition once it develops.

- Consider the breed before you adopt.
- Be familiar with a healthy body weight and strive to maintain that weight throughout your pet's life.
- Discuss diet options with your veterinarian to ensure optimal nutrition and facilitate weight loss.

- Have your pet examined by a veterinarian annually, even if it appears healthy.
- Critically assess your pet frequently: What and how much is it eating, drinking, defecating and urinating? How is its activity level? Has its behavior or the appearance of its coat changed recently? If yes, be sure to consult your veterinarian.

For additional information on the causes, signs and the most up-to-date guidelines on the prevention and treatment of diabetes in dogs and cats, please visit the following websites:

- For body condition score charts, see ivis.org/journals/vetfocus/16_1/en/7.pdf.
- For the AAHA article "Does your Pet Have Diabetes?" see healthypet.com/PetCare/PetCareArticle.aspx?title=Does_Your_Pet_Have_Diabetes.
- For AAHA Diabetes Guidelines, see aahanet.org/PublicDocuments/AAHADiabetesGuidelines.pdf.