

Could your dog or cat be  
**living with diabetes?**



Common signs and risk factors.



**petdiabetes**  
MONTH<sup>SM</sup>



The American Animal Hospital Association is  
a proud supporter of Pet Diabetes Month.

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes mellitus, the medical name for diabetes, is a disease caused by a lack of insulin, or the inability of the body to utilize the insulin properly, that affects the level of glucose, or sugar, in your dog or cat's blood. The glucose comes from the food that your pet eats. The food is broken down into very small components by the pet's digestive system so their bodies can use it for energy. Glucose is one of these components, and an important source of energy.

Glucose is absorbed from the intestines into the bloodstream where it travels to cells throughout the body. Insulin is required for the cells to absorb glucose. Insulin is produced by the pancreas in response to the amount of glucose in the bloodstream. Healthy pets produce insulin easily, but pets with diabetes don't. In canine and feline diabetes, unused glucose builds up in the bloodstream.



## Is diabetes in my pet the same as diabetes in people?

The two conditions are very similar. In fact, your veterinarian will be using medication, equipment, and monitoring systems that are similar to those used for diabetic people.

### How common is diabetes in dogs and cats?

Diabetes usually affects less than 1% of dogs and cats. But experts believe that it is on the rise.

### Can diabetes lead to other health problems?

Yes. Dogs and cats with diabetes can develop other health problems, usually after living with diabetes for a year or more.

For dogs, a common complication of diabetes is **cataract formation**. Persistently high blood glucose levels can make the lens of the eye opaque, causing blindness.

For cats, **weakness of the hind legs** is a common complication. Persistently high blood glucose levels may damage nerves, causing weakness and muscle wasting.

For both dogs and cats, controlling high blood glucose levels can lead to healthier outcomes. For this reason, early diagnosis of diabetes in your dog or cat is important.

## Will diabetes affect my dog or cat's life expectancy?

Today, with effective treatment and monitoring, a diabetic dog or cat should have the same life expectancy as a non-diabetic dog or cat of the same age. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment helps diabetic pets maintain a good quality of life.

## Is my dog or cat at risk for diabetes?

While diabetes has been diagnosed in dogs and cats of all ages, genders, and breeds, certain pets are at greater risk for the disease.

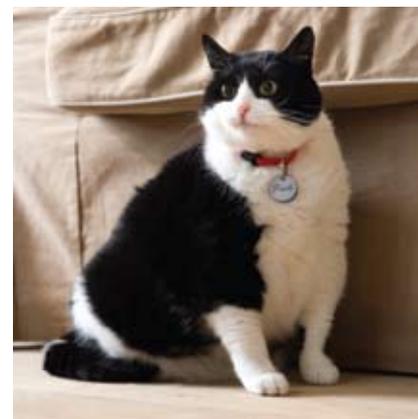
### *Risk factors in dogs*

- Age (middle-aged to older dogs are more affected)
- Unspayed females
- Genetics
- Obesity
- Breed—these breeds have a higher risk for developing diabetes:
  - Cocker Spaniels
  - Dachshunds
  - Doberman Pinschers
  - German Shepherds
  - Golden Retrievers
  - Labrador Retrievers
  - Pomeranians
  - Terriers
  - Toy Poodles



### *Risk factors in cats*

- Age (older cats are more susceptible)
- Neutered males
- Genetics
- Other insulin-resistant disorders or diseases, such as chronic pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) or hyperthyroidism (overproduction of thyroid hormones)
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Indoor lifestyle



## Are there warning signs I should be aware of?

Some common signs of diabetes in dogs and cats include:

- Excessive thirst
- Excessive urination—your pet produces more urine per day or has “accidents” in the house (dogs) or outside the litterbox (cats)
- Excessive hunger while losing weight
- Lethargy (less active/sleeps more)
- Cloudy eyes (dogs)
- Doesn't groom (cats)
- Thinning, dry, and dull hair



### How will my veterinarian test my pet for diabetes?

Your veterinarian may begin by performing a general health examination and asking questions about any signs your pet may be displaying. Then, a sample of your pet's urine will be tested for the presence of glucose (a type of sugar) or ketones (acids produced by the body as it breaks down fat instead of glucose for energy). If glucose is present in your pet's urine, your veterinarian will then test your pet's blood to determine the blood glucose level. A diabetes diagnosis is considered definite when persistently high glucose levels are found in *both* the blood and urine.

### How do I take care of a pet with diabetes?

Although there is no cure for diabetes, the disease can be successfully managed with the help of your veterinarian. **Daily insulin injections** are usually required to restore a pet's insulin level and control blood glucose levels. Many owners are anxious about giving injections, but it's easier than you think, and you can quickly learn how to handle the dosing routine with little stress for you or your pet. **Diet** plays a vital role in helping to keep your pet's diabetes regulated.

Your veterinarian can recommend a diet that's best suited to the needs of your pet. A high-quality, consistent source of protein is an essential part of any diabetic diet. **High-protein, low-carbohydrate foods** are currently recommended for diabetic cats because they provide the extra energy cats need to get through their active days, without the extra carbs that can turn into excess sugar. It is important to feed your pet based on its ideal body weight. Consistent timing and size of meals is also very important. **Exercise** can help dogs with diabetes, but it needs to be regulated because activity affects blood glucose levels. It's best to create a consistent exercise routine for your diabetic dog and stick to it. (There is no clear recommendation for exercise in diabetic cats because their activity is difficult to regulate.) **Regular veterinary checkups** can help identify changes in your pet's condition and help you to manage this disease successfully over time.

Managing your dog or cat's diabetes will require some effort, but the rewards are well worth it. Pets whose diabetes is under control have normal thirst, appetite, urination, and activity levels. Their weight is generally stable and they are less likely to develop complications.

## Where can I learn more about diabetes in dogs and cats?

The following websites provide useful information:

- [www.petdiabetesmonth.com](http://www.petdiabetesmonth.com)
- [www.pet-diabetes.com](http://www.pet-diabetes.com)
- [www.vetsulin.com](http://www.vetsulin.com)

# Is your dog or cat exhibiting any of these signs?

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Increased hunger while losing weight
- Lower activity
- Thinning, dry, or dull hair

If so, talk to your veterinarian about getting your pet screened for diabetes. With proper management and monitoring, a dog or cat with diabetes can lead a healthy, happy, and active life.



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