

DIABETES MELLITUS IN DOGS AND CATS

Diabetes mellitus is a condition characterised by high blood glucose (blood sugar) and glucose loss in the urine. It occurs when there is a deficiency or an insensitivity to the hormone insulin. Insulin is produced by cells in the pancreas and is responsible for maintaining blood glucose within normal limits and aids in the metabolism of fats, carbohydrates and proteins. Diabetic animals are either lacking in this hormone or cannot release their stores of insulin and have high blood glucose.

Surplus glucose then spills over into the urine through the kidneys along with water and causes excessive urination. Loss of water in urine is compensated for by increased thirst and the most commonly observed symptoms of an animal with diabetes are polyuria (excessive urination) and polydipsia (excessive water consumption). Other signs include weight loss, increased appetite, exercise intolerance, recurrent infections and cataracts (hardening of the lens in the eye causing a typically glassy blue stare). As the disease progresses animals may become inappetent, lethargic, depressed and may vomit. Diabetic animals are also more susceptible to a range of health problems and may experience delayed healing, urinary tract infections, gastrointestinal dysfunction, kidney disease and pancreatitis among other ailments.

The average age of onset in dogs is 8 years and 8-13 years in cats. Female dogs are more frequently affected than male dogs while male cats are more commonly affected than female cats. Diagnosing diabetes mellitus involves measuring blood glucose levels and examining urine samples for the presence of glucose. There is no cure for diabetes mellitus but it can be controlled with insulin therapy, dietary management and exercise.

Treatment is aimed at maintaining blood glucose levels as close to or within the normal range. In animals where diabetes is caused by an insulin deficiency this typically involves insulin therapy commonly given as subcutaneous injections twice daily. Weight loss is advisable in overweight animals and a consistent high fibre, low fat diet is recommended in all diabetic animals in conjunction with a frequent exercise regime. Leaving diabetes mellitus untreated greatly reduces a pet's quality of life and leaves them susceptible to other health problems. If your animal is exhibiting any of the signs of diabetes mellitus please contact your veterinarian to arrange an evaluation of your pet.