

Overview

Diabetes mellitus (diabetes) affects 1% of dogs in the U.S. and is most common in female middle-aged dogs. As in people, diabetes affects the endocrine (hormone) system and causes dangerously high levels of glucose in the blood. Though diabetes cannot be cured in dogs, it can be treated at home with insulin injections. Along with the right diet and monitoring by you and your veterinarian, your dog can lead a long, happy life with diabetes.



The Usdan Institute for Animal Health Education at the Animal Medical Center is the leading provider of pet health information. We aim to inform and empower pet owners and to share information with the public. With our staff of over 100 doctors and the knowledge gained from more than 100 years of experience, we are uniquely positioned to deliver the best and most up-to-date information for all your pet health needs.

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Diabetes in Dogs

Diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring for your dog

Pet parent education series



What is it?



- Diabetes is caused by your dog's inability to produce enough insulin to metabolize, or process, sugars. Sugar builds up in the bloodstream and can't be used by the body for energy.
- Most dogs get type 1 diabetes. In people, this is usually due to an autoimmune disease that attacks the pancreas. In dogs, pancreatic inflammation, or chronic pancreatitis, can be a cause.
- While any dog can get diabetes, the dog breeds more likely to have the disease are: Bichon Frise, Labrador Retriever, Poodle, Miniature Schnauzer, Pug, Yorkshire Terrier, and Samoyed.

What are the signs?



- Weight loss despite increased appetite
- Increased urination
- Increased thirst

If your dog shows any of these signs, call your veterinarian to discuss the possibility of diabetes.

How is it diagnosed?



- A diagnosis of diabetes is made based on clinical signs reported by the owner, a high blood sugar level, and sugar in the urine.
- Some veterinarians may also perform a fructosamine test, which is a blood test that tells the sugar levels for the past 2 weeks. This is similar to the hemoglobin A1C test used in people.

Can it be treated?



- There's no cure for diabetes in dogs, but it can be treated successfully.
- All dogs need twice daily doses of insulin through either injection or an insulin pen.
- You will need to give an insulin shot every 12 hours, but the injections are painless, fast, and easy to give.
- Pills, also called oral hypoglycemic agents, don't work in dogs.

How are diabetic dogs monitored?



- Veterinarians rely on clinical signs reported by owners to determine if diabetes is properly controlled.
- It may be helpful to keep a log of how often your dog urinates, how much water they drink, their appetite, and the insulin dose.
- You can also use tools such as urine dipsticks to measure the amount of sugar in the urine and at-home blood sugar tests.
- Always follow your veterinarian's instructions when adjusting the insulin dose to avoid giving your dog too much or too little.

What if insulin doesn't work?



- If the insulin is not improving your dog's condition, check to see if you're handling and injecting the insulin properly.
- Your veterinarian may recommend testing for other diseases that can prevent the insulin from working, such as Cushing's disease or a urinary tract infection.

What should you feed a diabetic dog?



- Typically, a diabetic dog eats two meals per day, and the insulin shot is given within an hour of feeding. Your veterinarian will consider your dog's complete health when choosing a pet food.
- Avoid giving snacks to your diabetic dog during the day.
- High-fiber foods may help prevent the blood sugar from spiking after a meal, and help promote weight loss in overweight dogs.
- Some diabetic dogs may benefit from a diet that is low in carbohydrates.

What is the prognosis?



- Many dogs with diabetes can live a long and fulfilling life.
- Owners must be willing to invest time and money to ensure optimal control of diabetes.

