

Ask the Vet



Dr. Cecilia Ho

Dr. Cecilia Ho is a graduate of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University. She decided to specialize in feline medicine two years into private practice as she found feline medicine to be more challenging and rewarding. She has owned and operated Cat Care Hospital in Greensboro for seven years.

How can I tell that my cat has diabetes?

The most common signs of a diabetic cat is excessive water consumption and urination. Cats usually do not drink very often and if they begin drinking large quantities, it is usually a sign that there may be something wrong. Cats that are usually secretive drinkers (drink water while the owners are not watching) will start drinking out of unusual places like the toilet bowl, kitchen sink or the bathtub. Excessive water consumption is usually followed by excessive urination. Most owners will notice that the clumps of urine in the box will be larger or that they have to scoop more frequently to keep the box clean.

Another common sign of diabetes in a cat is an excessive or extremely good appetite. Diabetic cats usually act as if they are ravenous and will beg for food constantly. Despite this excessive appetite, most diabetic cats will also begin losing noticeable weight. Since most diabetic cats are overweight, this is one of the first signs seen by owners especially if the cat is not on a weight loss program.

Some diabetic cats will also begin to act lethargic and depressed. Some may develop weakness in their legs, especially the hind legs and have difficulty jumping.

What is the treatment for a diabetic cat?

Most diabetic cats will have to start on insulin injections. There are several different types of insulin that are available for cats and the choice of insulin depends on the severity of the diabetes, the presence of other concurrent diseases and also on how well the cat responds to the insulin. These decisions can be made by the cat's veterinarian. Cats tolerate these injections very well and will barely take notice after they have been treated for a while.

There are also prescription diets available specifically for diabetic cats. These diets help to regulate the cat's blood glucose more consistently and in some cases, may even allow the cat to discontinue the insulin injections altogether. However, the decision to start the cat on the diet must be made cautiously as the high protein content of the diet may adversely affect some older diabetic cats that are already suffering from kidney disease. Again this is a decision that must be made between the owner and the veterinarian.

There are now blood glucose meters that are made specifically for cats and dogs. These meters are easy to use and allows the owner to monitor the cat's blood glucose at home, free from the stress of a visit to the veterinary clinic.

What is the prognosis for a diabetic cat?

The prognosis for most diabetic cats is good. Most diabetic cats respond well to treatment and as long as no complications arise from the diabetes, cats can continue doing well for years. Prevention is perhaps the most important issue. If your cat is gaining excessive weight, please discuss different weight loss options with your veterinarian. Frequent veterinary exams are also crucial to detect early signs of disease. Since some of the symptoms of diabetes mimic several other common diseases in cats, it is important to have your cat examined by a veterinarian if you should notice any of the signs listed above.

Diabetes and cats

As the holiday season approaches our thoughts turn to family, friends, gifts and of course, food- lots of it. Unfortunately, our feline friends will also be sharing this celebration of fun and food. One of the fastest growing health concerns in feline medicine today is the overwhelming number of obesity cases. Obesity can lead to numerous diseases such as cardiac disease, early arthritis, liver disease and diabetes.

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