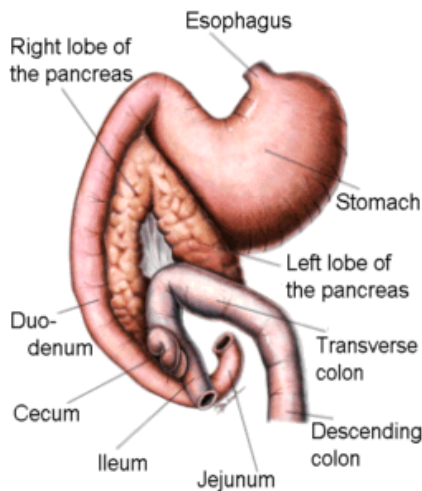


Common questions about canine diabetes

Diabetes mellitus is a common problem in dogs. Caring for a diabetic animal requires some effort, but most pets remain happy and comfortable. Successful patient management requires a team effort between you and our veterinary care team.

What is diabetes mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus is a disease caused by a deficiency of (or lack of response to) insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is produced by the pancreas. The cells of the body require blood sugar (glucose) for food and they depend on the bloodstream to bring glucose to them. The cells cannot, however, absorb and utilize glucose without insulin. Insulin is necessary for the movement of glucose from the blood into the cells of the body.



What are the signs of diabetes?

Excessive thirst, frequent urination, increased hunger, sudden weight loss and weakness are seen in dogs with diabetes. Without insulin, glucose remains in the bloodstream and eventually passes into the urine. This causes increased urination, which then leads to an increase in thirst. Hunger increases because the body cannot use the glucose in the blood, which results in the body destroying muscle and fat to use as energy sources. Elevated glucose levels can also lead to glucose accumulation within the lens of the eye, which can lead to the formation of cataracts. If left untreated, this disease sets off a series of events which results in weight loss, major organ system failure, blindness, and eventually coma and death.

Why is my dog diabetic?

Dogs become diabetic due to genetic factors, combined with environmental triggers. Many dogs with diabetes are overweight, or were previously, and this may also play a role.

Is there a cure for diabetes?

Unfortunately, the answer is no. With very rare exceptions, diabetes in dogs is a permanent condition and life-long therapy is necessary.

Will my dog need insulin?

Yes. Most diabetic dogs are insulin dependent, which means that they need regular insulin injections to control glucose levels.

What does the insulin do?

Insulin moves glucose from the blood into the cells. Glucose is an essential fuel for most of the tissues in the body, and without insulin, cell metabolism is severely compromised. Providing insulin in the form of an injection allows your dog to be able to utilize its glucose and maintain relatively normal glucose levels.

How do I give insulin?

Our veterinary team will show you exactly how to give insulin injections, but it's really very simple. The insulin dose is pulled up into a special syringe, and injected under the skin. It is often easiest to inject between the shoulder blades or along the neck.



Do the insulin injections hurt?

Insulin syringes have very small needles, and most dogs do not notice the injection. It is often easiest to administer the injection while your dog is distracted with food, a treat, or a toy. Most people are surprised at how easy insulin injections are to give.



What follow-up is involved with treating diabetes in dogs?

In the non-diabetic dog, adequate amounts of insulin are produced continually (or as needed) by the pancreas to maintain normal blood sugar levels. When we give insulin injections, we administer a fixed amount at one time and that insulin is slowly released over several hours. A blood glucose curve is needed to determine how fast the injected insulin gets into the bloodstream and how long it lasts. Based on these results, we can determine if the correct type of insulin is being used and if the dose needs to be adjusted. Blood glucose curves are needed periodically to insure that the proper amount of insulin is being used. Blood glucose curves are performed by obtaining a blood glucose level every 2 hours over a 12 hour period. Generally, if your dog's blood glucose is elevated throughout the curve, their insulin dose needs to be increased. If your dog's blood glucose level is too low throughout or at any point during the curve, the insulin dose needs to be decreased.

What are the possible complications associated with treating my dog with insulin?

The most serious complication involved in treatment of diabetes is administration of too much insulin, which can trigger a dramatic drop in blood sugar leading to weakness, nausea, incoordination, seizures, and even death. Immediate feeding of a sugary food (honey, syrup, etc.) usually helps reverse this reaction. Other difficulties encountered generally revolve around finding the correct amount, timing and type of insulin given. While this is not often the case, "problem diabetes" do exist and have a higher incidence of concurrent disease such as lower urinary tract infections, kidney disease and liver disease.

Can I monitor my dog's blood sugar (glucose) at home?

Learning to measure your dog's glucose levels is very worthwhile. Firstly, information collected at home is a reflection of what's happening day to day in your dog's normal living environment. Home glucose monitoring would allow you to be able to perform your dog's glucose curves at home. Our veterinary team can use the values you obtain at home to adjust insulin therapy more appropriately and accurately. Secondly, if your dog seems unwell, you can quickly determine if blood sugar levels are dangerously high or low. It is very important to always consult our veterinary team prior to making any insulin adjustments.

The thought of glucose home monitoring may seem overwhelming at first, but it is an option to consider and can be started at any time during your dog's diabetic treatment. Our veterinary team would be happy to demonstrate proper and easy blood sampling techniques and provide a home glucose monitoring kit.



What are the costs associated with treating my diabetic dog?

The major costs associated with treatment of diabetes include insulin, syringes and the cost of the glucose curves to regulate insulin requirements. We can give you a more accurate estimation of treatment cost at your consultation appointment.

Making the decision to care for your dog with diabetes is a big commitment, but many owners of diabetic dogs have found treatment to be a very rewarding and enriching experience. There is a lot to learn and it is important to be patient with yourself and your dog during the learning process. Diabetes is a serious disease, but it can usually be well-controlled, enabling your pet to lead a happy and comfortable life.

Our veterinary care team has reviewed the following websites on canine diabetes and found them to be an accurate source of valuable information.

www.veterinarypartner.com

www.caninediabetes.com