



Chronic Condition Care: Diabetes

While diabetes can affect any cat, it most commonly occurs in older, overweight cats, and in male cats more frequently than females. While the cause isn't known, obesity, chronic pancreatitis and hormonal diseases (such as hyperthyroidism and Cushing's disease), and certain medications (steroids) have all been linked to the disease.

Feline diabetes is highly manageable if caught early. Most cats with diabetes live full, normal lives with treatment. Some cats receiving treatment experience only mild symptoms; others can eventually stop treatment altogether.

Excessive urination and thirst are signs

Feline diabetes is a complex but common disease in which a cat's body either doesn't produce or doesn't properly use insulin. There are two types: 1) insulin-dependent and 2) non-insulin-dependent. About one-half to three-quarters of diabetic cats have the insulin-dependent type and require immediate insulin injections. Ultimately most diabetic cats require insulin at some point.

Symptoms vary depending upon the type of diabetes and stage of the disease. Your cat may have diabetes if he/she exhibits:

- Ravenous appetite
- Weight loss
- Increased urination
- Increased water consumption
- Lethargy
- Progressive weakness in rear legs

If you see any of these signs, see your veterinarian

Diabetes is confirmed with a blood test and urinalysis. **Once diabetes has been diagnosed, immediate treatment is essential.** Some cats can be treated with oral medications; others require insulin injections and regular monitoring of blood glucose levels. In some cats, diabetes reverses its course after time; others need lifelong treatment. ALL diabetic cats do best with consistent medication, consistent feeding and a stable, stress-free lifestyle. If your cat is overweight, your veterinarian will suggest a gradual, safe weight-loss program.

If left untreated, diabetes will:

- Lead to liver disease, bacterial infections and unhealthy skin and coat.
- Cause progressive weakness, especially in the hind legs, forcing cats to walk with their hocks on the ground.
- Sometimes result in a dangerous, potentially fatal condition called ketoacidosis causing loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, weakness, dehydration and breathing difficulty.
- Shorten your cat's life.

Diabetes is more common in overweight and obese cats. Weight management and exercise are essential to your feline's health. Avoid overfeeding your cat and make sure your cat gets regular exercise. See [Nutrition and Weight Control for your cat](#). If your cat tends to be sedentary, stimulate him/her to exercise with regular play and plenty of toys. Find out where to get [Simply the best cat toys](#).