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FELINE DIABETES

Diabetes is a disorder in which the pancreas stops or decreases secretion of insulin or the insulin does not function properly. Multiple factors can lead to the development of diabetes. They include genetics, infections, abnormally high levels of steroids and certain hormones, or amyloidosis (protein deposits in the pancreas). Often diabetic animals are obese. This lack of functioning insulin leads to high levels of glucose in the bloodstream. It becomes so high that the kidneys cannot keep glucose from being excreted in the urine.

The most common clinical signs are excessive drinking and urination, increased appetite and weight loss. Some cats will develop a diabetic neuropathy causing them to walk with their rear limbs plantigrade (flattened like a rabbit). Other cats may present with signs of urinary tract infection because the sugar in the urine is food for bacteria.

A diagnosis is made when glucose levels are high in both blood and urine. This is necessary because stress can cause a transient rise in blood glucose, but not in urine. Vice versa, primary kidney problems can cause glucose to leak into the urine even when blood levels are normal. A complete blood count, chemistry profile, and urinalysis are required to evaluate the total health of your cat.

Treatment involves insulin therapy. Since no set dose works for every cat, we begin with a low dose and gradually increase the amount of insulin needed until urine production decreases. Then a glucose curve is performed. The morning feeding and insulin are given and blood glucose is measured every 2-3 hours throughout the day by taking small blood samples. Ideally, the levels should remain between 100 and 250 mg/dl. The insulin dosage and/or type are adjusted until a proper glucose curve is achieved. Cats may also be placed on a specialized diet to help control their diabetes.

Although diabetes is a serious health problem, it is a disease that in most cases can be successfully controlled. The best treatment, however, is prevention. This includes yearly health exams and a good diet. Remember, a fat cat does not equal a healthy cat.