

# Understanding Diabetes in Cats

Diabetes mellitus — often just called **diabetes** — is a common condition in cats, especially as they get older. The diagnosis can sound alarming at first, but with today's treatments and monitoring options, most diabetic cats can live long, happy, and comfortable lives.

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## What Is Diabetes Mellitus?

Diabetes occurs when a cat's body has trouble regulating blood sugar (glucose) levels. Normally, the pancreas produces a hormone called **insulin**, which helps move glucose from the bloodstream into cells for energy.

In diabetic cats, either:

- The pancreas **doesn't make enough insulin**, or
- The body's cells **don't respond properly** to insulin (a problem called *insulin resistance*).

As a result, glucose builds up in the bloodstream instead of being used for energy — causing many of the signs of diabetes.

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## Who's at Risk?

Diabetes can occur in any cat, but some are more prone than others. Risk factors include:

- Middle-aged to older cats (usually over 7 years)
  - Overweight or obese cats
  - Cats with other conditions such as pancreatitis
  - Long-term use of steroids
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## Common Signs of Diabetes in Cats

The symptoms of diabetes often appear gradually. Keep an eye out for:

- **Increased thirst and urination** (you may notice bigger clumps in the litter box)
- **Increased appetite** (often paired with weight loss)
- **Lethargy or weakness**
- **Dull or greasy coat**
- **Hind leg weakness** (due to a condition called diabetic neuropathy)

If your cat is showing any of these signs, it's important to schedule a veterinary exam and lab work. Early diagnosis makes treatment more successful.

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## How Is Feline Diabetes Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will likely recommend:

- **Blood tests** to measure glucose and other indicators
- **Urinalysis** to check for glucose or ketones in the urine

Because cats can have “stress hyperglycemia” (temporary high blood sugar from anxiety at the vet), diagnosis often involves reviewing multiple results or using a **fructosamine test**, which measures average blood glucose over the past 2–3 weeks.

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## Treatment and Daily Management

Most diabetic cats require:

- **Daily insulin injections** (usually twice a day)
- **A consistent, low-carbohydrate diet**
- **Regular monitoring** to keep glucose levels in a safe range

### Insulin Injections

Your veterinarian will teach you how to give insulin at home. Most owners find this much easier than they expected — cats tolerate it very well, and the needles are tiny.

## Diet

A **low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet** is often recommended. Feeding should happen at consistent times each day, ideally just before insulin injections. Sudden diet changes should only be made under veterinary guidance.

## Oral diabetes medication

There is a once daily oral medication available for newly diagnosed cats with diabetes called Senvelgo®. Not all cats are good candidates for this medication, but for those that are it can be used instead of twice daily insulin injections. Your veterinarian will discuss the treatment options for your pet, and work with you to make a plan that fits their individual case.

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## Monitoring Your Cat's Diabetes

Monitoring is key to keeping your cat healthy and ensuring the insulin dose is just right. There are several ways to track how your cat is doing:

### 1. Clinical Signs at Home

Watch for changes in thirst, urination, appetite, activity level, and body weight. Improvement in these areas usually means the diabetes is under good control.

### 2. Periodic Blood Tests

Your vet will check blood glucose levels and fructosamine during rechecks. These help assess long-term control.

### 3. Glucose Curves

A **glucose curve** measures your cat's blood sugar over a 12–24-hour period. It shows:

- How low the glucose goes (the *nadir*),
- When that low point occurs, and
- How high it climbs again before the next insulin dose.

This information helps your vet fine-tune the insulin type and dose.

Traditionally, glucose curves are done in the hospital, but many cats get more accurate results when tested **at home**, since stress at the clinic can temporarily raise blood sugar.

### 4. At-Home Glucose Monitoring

Many cat owners successfully check glucose levels at home using a **pet glucometer** (not a human one, as the readings differ). A small drop of blood is collected — usually from the ear, paw pad, or occasionally the lip — and the meter gives an instant reading.

Alternatively, we may place an interstitial glucose monitor (such as a Freestyle Libre 2) which can stay in place for up to 14 days and provide continuous glucose monitoring via an app on your phone.

At-home monitoring allows you to:

- Reduce stress for your cat
- Get more realistic data
- Detect dangerous highs or lows early
- Share results with your vet for ongoing dose adjustments

Your Benson View Veterinary team can show you exactly how to do this safely and comfortably.

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## Can Cats Go Into Remission?

Yes! With early diagnosis, proper insulin therapy, and a controlled diet, some diabetic cats can achieve **remission** — meaning their blood sugar normalizes and they no longer need insulin (at least temporarily).

Remission is more likely if diabetes is caught early and managed carefully from the start.

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## Possible Complications

While diabetes can be well-controlled, it's important to watch for complications, such as:

- **Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)** — signs include wobbliness, weakness, or seizures. If this happens, rub corn syrup or honey on your cat's gums and call your vet right away.
  - **Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)** — a serious, life-threatening emergency that causes vomiting, lethargy, dehydration, and poor appetite. Immediate veterinary care is required.
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## Living with a Diabetic Cat

Most diabetic cats continue to live full, happy lives once their routine is established. You'll play a big role in keeping your cat healthy by:

- Giving insulin and meals consistently
- Monitoring for changes in thirst, appetite, or energy
- Bringing your cat for regular checkups and glucose curves
- Working closely with your veterinarian to adjust treatment as needed

With teamwork and dedication, diabetes can be managed very successfully — and your cat can continue to enjoy a great quality of life.

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## **When to Call Your Veterinarian**

Contact your vet if:

- Your cat skips a meal or refuses to eat
- You accidentally give the wrong insulin dose
- Your cat vomits, seems weak, or acts “off”
- You notice new or worsening symptoms

Prompt communication helps prevent emergencies and keeps your cat feeling their best.

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A diabetes diagnosis doesn't mean your cat's happy days are over. With insulin, a proper diet, and regular monitoring — especially with modern at-home tools — diabetic cats can thrive for years.

If you think your cat might have diabetes, or you'd like to learn more about glucose monitoring at home, our veterinary team is here to guide you every step of the way.