

Understanding Diabetes in Dogs

Just like people, dogs can develop **diabetes mellitus**, a condition that affects how their body uses sugar (glucose) for energy. While hearing that your dog has diabetes can be worrying, the good news is that with proper care, monitoring, and support from your veterinary team, most diabetic dogs can live long, happy, and healthy lives.

What Is Diabetes Mellitus?

Glucose is a vital source of energy for the body's cells. To move glucose from the bloodstream into the cells, the body relies on a hormone called **insulin**, produced by the pancreas.

In dogs with diabetes mellitus, this process doesn't work properly. Either:

- The pancreas **doesn't make enough insulin**, or
- The body **doesn't respond properly** to the insulin that's produced.

As a result, sugar builds up in the bloodstream instead of being used for energy — leading to the signs and complications of diabetes.

Types of Diabetes in Dogs

Most dogs have **Type I diabetes**, which means their body no longer produces insulin. This type is **permanent** and requires **daily insulin injections**.

Type II diabetes (where the body resists insulin) is rare in dogs but more common in cats.

Which Dogs Are at Risk?

Any dog can develop diabetes, but it's most common in:

- **Middle-aged to older dogs** (usually over 6 years old)
- **Females** (especially unspayed females)
- **Overweight dogs**

- Certain breeds, such as:
 - Miniature Schnauzers
 - Poodles
 - Dachshunds
 - Beagles
 - Cairn Terriers
 - Samoyeds
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Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes

The signs of diabetes can appear gradually, so early recognition is key. Common symptoms include:

- **Increased thirst and urination** (you may notice your dog drinking more water or having accidents in the house)
- **Increased hunger** despite eating normally or more than usual
- **Weight loss**
- **Lethargy or weakness**
- **Cloudy eyes or cataracts** (common in diabetic dogs)
- **Recurrent urinary tract infections**

If you notice any of these signs, schedule a visit with your veterinarian. Early diagnosis makes management much easier and helps prevent serious complications.

How Is Diabetes Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will perform:

- **A physical exam**
- **Blood tests** to measure glucose levels
- **Urinalysis** to check for glucose or ketones in the urine

Consistently high blood sugar and glucose in the urine confirm the diagnosis.

Managing Diabetes: Treatment and Care

Managing diabetes in dogs requires **a daily routine**, but once you and your dog adjust, it quickly becomes second nature. Treatment typically includes:

Insulin Injections

Most diabetic dogs need **twice-daily insulin injections** under the skin. Your veterinarian will teach you how to do this safely and comfortably at home — most dogs tolerate it very well!

Diet

A **consistent, balanced diet** is essential. Many diabetic dogs do best on:

- High-fiber, complex-carbohydrate diets
- Regular meal times (usually right before insulin doses)
- Strict control of treats and table food

Your vet will recommend a diet tailored to your dog's needs and other health conditions.

Routine and Monitoring

Consistency is the cornerstone of diabetes management:

- Give insulin at the same times every day.
- Feed consistent meals.
- Maintain regular exercise routines (avoid sudden increases or decreases in activity).
- Monitor your dog's weight, appetite, thirst, and urination.

- Schedule regular vet visits and periodic blood glucose curves to ensure insulin doses remain effective.
 - For newly diagnosed dogs or during times your dog is not responding as expected (for example, if they have another illness in addition to their diabetes) we may recommend an interstitial glucose monitor (such as a Freestyle Libre 2) for continuous glucose monitoring at home
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Possible Complications

If left untreated, diabetes can lead to serious issues such as:

- **Cataracts and vision loss**
- **Urinary tract infections**
- **Liver problems**
- **Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA)** — a life-threatening emergency that requires immediate care

Signs of a diabetic emergency (DKA) include:

- Vomiting
- Weakness or collapse
- Sweet or fruity-smelling breath
- Rapid breathing

If you ever notice these signs, seek veterinary care **immediately**.

Living with a Diabetic Dog

Life with a diabetic dog takes commitment, but many owners find it becomes part of their daily routine quickly. With consistent care, these dogs can live normal, joyful lives filled with walks, playtime, and cuddles.

You can help by:

- Giving insulin and meals on schedule
- Keeping regular vet appointments
- Watching for any changes in appetite, energy, or urination
- Maintaining a healthy weight

Your veterinary team is your best resource — they'll guide you through every step, from giving injections to adjusting insulin doses as needed.

When to Call Your Veterinarian

Contact your veterinarian if:

- Your dog skips meals or vomits after eating
- You accidentally give too much or too little insulin
- Your dog seems unusually tired, wobbly, or weak
- You notice signs of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar): trembling, disorientation, or collapse

Having a plan in place for these situations — including keeping a small amount of honey or corn syrup on hand for emergencies — can help keep your dog safe.

A diagnosis of diabetes doesn't mean the end of your dog's happy, active life. With a little extra attention and teamwork between you and your veterinarian, diabetic dogs can thrive for years.

If you've noticed any signs of diabetes or your dog has recently been diagnosed, our team is here to help with personalized care, hands-on training, and ongoing support.