

Ask A Vet: Good News for Kitty with Diabetes

Sunday, January 25, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I recently had my cat diagnosed with diabetes mellitus. Needless to say I was overwhelmed. Can you please help me process the decision if I should treat the cat? I love my cat but I am on a fixed income.

-Concerned

Dear Concerned,

I very much appreciate your concern and anxiety. I want to breakdown the disease and what your options are. As you may be aware, two types of diabetes exist in humans, dogs and cats. Type 1 is due to an absolute deficiency of insulin being produced in the beta cells of the pancreas. The other form Type 2, is non-insulin dependent and has an irregular pattern of insulin being secreted by the pancreas and is more commonly associated with insulin resistance from obesity. Dogs usually have Type 1 whereas cats more commonly have Type 2 although if they get Type 1, it is generally associated with chronic pancreatitis. The challenge in discerning which your cat has can be further complicated because cats can transition between both of these. Factors that can lead to either or include the pathology (or disease) of the pancreas; how fast it is progressing; presence of other concurrent diseases like urinary tract , renal or liver disease; obesity; and the type and calorie content of diet. Diagnosis is based on very characteristic signs of polyuria (increased urination), polydipsia(increased drinking), polyphagia(increased eating), weight loss, persistent urinary tract infections, weakness, muscle wasting, cataracts (dogs) and peripheral neuropathies(cats) dragging their legs and of course increased glucose in blood (hyperglycemia) and urine (glucosuria). Blood samples collected throughout a day measuring glucose known as a glucose curve helps determine type. Keep in mind cats can easily be stressed which can cause a spike in blood glucose. One also has to rule out other diseases such as hyperthyroidism and gastrointestinal issues that have similar clinical signs. Significant ketones in urine with elevated blood glucose are diagnostic for diabetes in cats.

The good news is that 70% of diabetic cats have been reported to go into remission just by controlling diet. Cat's best respond to low carbohydrate diets from prescription foods, especially canned. If too expensive, there are commercially available ones. If diet alone does not bring the glucose into "normal" range after 2 weeks, then insulin therapy should be instituted. Stable cats less than 400mg/dl can be treated with a diet change. As veterinarians our goal is to treat any ongoing diseases, maintain proper hydration and electrolytes and bring the blood glucose into normalcy. It takes about 4-6 weeks for initial diabetic control. The cost greatly depends on the type of insulin prescribed and quite honestly, it takes a committed person to do insulin therapy for their pet. You really do need a heart to heart with your vet and the health care team to assess exactly what you will be spending. Don't be embarrassed at all about asking these sensitive questions. We are used to it and we want to help you make an informed decision.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz