



**My dog has  
been diagnosed with  
diabetes**

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## What is diabetes mellitus?

Diabetes mellitus is a common condition in dogs caused by a deficiency in the hormone insulin. It generally affects middle-aged and older dogs, and is usually diagnosed in dogs between 5 and 12 years old.

## What are the initial symptoms of diabetes mellitus?

The majority of dogs are presented to the vet because of increased drinking and urination, increased eating, weight loss and muscle wasting.

## How is diabetes mellitus managed?

Your vet will discuss and agree with you a management programme tailored to your dog. The main areas that are usually covered by this type of programme are diet, exercise and medication. The key to achieving successful management of diabetes mellitus is a fixed daily routine. Normally, the same dose of insulin is given each day, the type and amount of food should be the same and, ideally, there should be no large variations in the amount of exercise.

## How do I administer insulin to my dog?

Your vet will demonstrate how to draw up and administer insulin to your dog. Insulin is injected under the skin using a small needle, either attached to a syringe or as part of an insulin 'pen'. If you are using a needle and syringe, then the insulin bottle should be rolled gently before drawing up the required volume of insulin into the syringe. Do not shake the bottle. Ensure that there are no air bubbles in the syringe. Insert the needle under the skin in the area of the neck and administer the insulin dose. Remember to vary the injection site in this area every few days.

## How often do I need to administer insulin to my dog?

Your vet will advise you whether once-daily or twice-daily injections of insulin are required for your dog. This is determined by the type of insulin to be administered and its duration of action.

## How should I store insulin?

Insulin is usually stored in the refrigerator (preferably not in the door) to avoid extremes in light and temperature. Insulin should not be used past its expiry date.

## Can my dog's diabetes mellitus be controlled without insulin injections?

No. At present injection is the only effective method of insulin delivery in dogs.

## What type of diet should I feed my dog?

The most important factor when selecting a diet is whether your dog finds the food palatable and will eat it consistently. There are a number of tasty prescription diets (both wet and dry formulations) available that are



formulated specifically to support the management of diabetic patients. Your vet will be able to advise you which diet is best for your dog.

### **How often should I feed my dog?**

Food should be divided into at least two meals a day. Timing of feeding depends on the insulin regime and your vet will be able to advise you what is most appropriate for your dog. If your dog is being treated with insulin once daily, then normally the first meal (50% of the total daily allowance) should be fed to coincide with the insulin injection. The second meal (remaining 50% of the total daily allowance) should be fed 6-8 hours after the insulin injection. If your dog is receiving insulin twice daily, then in most cases your dog should be fed a meal (50% of the total daily allowance) at the time of each injection.

### **What should I do if my dog refuses to eat?**

Your dog will still need insulin, even if it misses a meal, but normally at a reduced dose. Contact your vet if your dog refuses to eat for advice on how much insulin to administer and because this may be a sign of more serious problems such as ketoacidosis or pancreatitis.

### **How much exercise should I provide for my dog?**

Exercise does not need to be restricted, although it can take time to build up the muscle lost in the early part of the disease. The most important factor is consistency – it is not ideal for your dog to have little or no exercise during the week and go out for long walks at the weekend. The amount of exercise should be increased slowly over time. It is advisable to take a sugary snack or



oral glucose gel with you when you go out for a walk, in case your dog starts to show signs of hypoglycaemia (becoming weak, disoriented or staggering).

### **What are the long-term considerations?**

A routine clinical appointment should be scheduled approximately every 2 months if your dog's diabetes mellitus is well controlled. Regular appointments with your vet are advisable as insulin dose adjustments are sometimes necessary because of weight gain, concurrent disease or changes in your dog's diet and exercise regimen. Regular vet visits also help decrease the risk of diabetic emergencies by identifying and treating any changes as soon as possible. Some dogs with diabetes mellitus develop cataracts, which can lead to blindness; these can usually be effectively treated by veterinary ophthalmologists.

### **Whom do I contact if I want to know more?**

If you have any questions about the management of diabetes mellitus or concerns about your dog's health, contact your own vet. They will know your dog's medical history and will be able to discuss your dog's health and care with you.



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