

Diabetes Mellitus in older dogs

Diabetes is common in older dogs - but what is it?

The most common type of diabetes mellitus (or sugar diabetes) in dogs is due to a lack of the hormone insulin. Insulin is manufactured in an organ called the pancreas and it is responsible for moving glucose from the blood into cells. When the pancreas produces insufficient amounts of insulin it is called insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM)

There is another, less common, form of the disease in which the pancreas produces enough insulin but receptors on the cells fail to respond to the hormone. This condition is called "insulin resistance" and it is often associated with obesity. This form of the disease is called non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM). In both forms of the disease the effects are the same;

- Glucose (or sugar) levels in the blood become too high
- The kidneys are unable to reclaim all the glucose and some spills over into the urine.
- This constant loss of sugar in the urine means the animal loses weight.
- If left untreated the dog starts to breakdown his body tissue to provide energy.

What are the signs of diabetes?

The most noticeable sign is extreme thirst, which means you need to fill the water bowl more often, or your pet may not be able to hold its urine all night. At first your dog will seem well but is thirsty and losing weight. Sometimes, if the condition is becoming serious, the owner may notice a sickly sweet smell, likened to nail varnish remover, on the dog's breath. This is due to ketone production and is a warning sign that the pet may soon become very unwell and urgent veterinary advice should be sought.

How is diabetes diagnosed?

The easiest test is a simple dipstick in a sample of the dog's urine. If glucose is detected then the vet will advise further blood tests. Stress can sometimes artificially raise the dog's glucose levels, so on occasions it is appropriate to run a blood test that gives an overview of the pet's sugar levels for the past two to three weeks.

How is diabetes treated?

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, there are two important ways of controlling the condition.

Firstly, a special high-fibre, slow energy release diet may be prescribed. The timing of meals and the quantity of food fed, needs to be carefully controlled. Also, if your pet is overweight it is important to put him or her on a weight reduction diet.

Secondly, your dog may be started on insulin injections, which are usually given twice a day. During the initial stages of starting insulin it is sometimes necessary to keep your dog with us for

one or two days until we can find the ideal amount of insulin to give. Once stabilised then regular checks and a blood test every 3 months are usually sufficient to maintain good control over the condition.

Please feel free to contact the surgery should you have any further questions about your dog's condition.