

The [Alabama Veterinary Medical Association](#) wants to remind pet owners that pets can develop diabetes, too. November is National Pet Diabetes Month and an opportunity to raise awareness about the risk of diabetes in pets. There are signs to look for that indicate your pet may be diabetic. Diabetes in pets is treatable, but diagnosis is key to ensuring your pet will live a long, healthy life.

“Pet diabetes is becoming more prevalent, as we see a rise in pet obesity,” says ALVMA President Hal Pate, D.V.M. “Like people, pets are susceptible to diabetes. If you notice any of the symptoms below you should consult with your veterinarian immediately.”

November is National Pet Diabetes Month and just like people, our pets can also suffer from diabetes. Diabetes is an inability of the animal’s body to detect and regulate the uptake of glucose into the body. This is normally due to either an inability of the pancreas to produce insulin at all (Type 1 diabetes) or the pancreas can’t produce enough insulin (Type 2). Healthy pets produce insulin easily, but pets with diabetes don’t.

Symptoms of diabetes in pets include: Excessive eating, Excessive drinking, Excessive urination, Weight loss, Persistent urinary tract infections and, possibly, Cataracts.

The liver is adversely affected by this condition, as are the eyes and kidneys. Although numbers are hard to pinpoint, it is believed that the prevalence of diabetes in our pets average about one in 500 for cats and one in 100 in dogs that reach age 12. In dogs, the disease appears to be more common in middle-aged to older pets, especially females, but it may also appear in younger pets. In one study, diabetes rates increased from 0.2% to 0.6% of pets in just 30 years. Experts worry that as our pets’ epidemic continues, diabetes prevalence will rise as well.

Certain breeds of dogs experience above-average rates of diabetes. These include: Toy Poodles, Terriers, Cocker Spaniels, Dachshunds, Doberman Pinschers, German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers. In cats, diabetes is also more common in middle- to older-aged animals and cats that are overweight. Neutered males are at a greater risk than females.

Almost all dogs diagnosed with diabetes develop Type 1 diabetes. The exact reason is not clear, but dogs that are obese or on corticosteroids for extended periods of time are predisposed to the disease. Cats, on the other hand, are almost always Type 2 diabetics. This is also known as non-insulin dependent diabetes. Like dogs, chubby cats and cats taking steroids routinely can develop a resistance to insulin. Additionally, chronic inflammation in the cat can create amyloid deposits that destroy normal pancreatic tissue. Diabetic dogs will almost always need to be on insulin for the remainder of their lives. Some cats can have their diabetes controlled and even reversed by good glucose control and proper diet.

When diabetes goes undiagnosed, or when it is difficult to control or regulate, the complication of Diabetes Ketoacidosis (DKA) can occur. DKA develops because the body is so lacking in insulin that the sugar can’t get into the cells – resulting in cell starvation. Cell starvation causes the body to start breaking down fat in an attempt to provide energy (or a fuel source) to the body. Unfortunately, these fat breakdown products, called “ketones,” are also poisonous to the body. When diabetes is left untreated, this condition develops and is life-threatening, but can be controlled if you seek veterinary attention and treat the symptoms.

Diabetic pets are managed with injectable insulin, a good consistent diet, proper exercise and weight loss. Diabetes is not and should not be a death sentence for your pet. With proper training and consistent attention, you can help your pet live a long and wonderful life.