



Caring for a cat who suffers from diabetes

Despite feline diabetes being a fairly complicated disease, cats that are diagnosed with it can live long and happy lives with the right treatment

BY EMILY FOWLER

Feline diabetes, something that's more common in cats that are middle-aged and older and particularly those that are overweight, is the inability to produce enough insulin to control blood glucose levels. It's similar to Type II (non-insulin dependent) diabetes in humans, meaning problems with the cat's pancreas affect the production of insulin, and the cat will also suffer with 'insulin resistance', meaning the tissues in the cat's body struggle to respond to the insulin that is produced.

A vet will usually diagnose diabetes from the results of blood and urine testing and once diagnosed, it can certainly be managed by a dedicated owner who's willing to put in the time and care needed to treat the disease. While the thought of caring for a diabetic cat can seem daunting to some owners, the actual treatment and management of diabetes will quite quickly become just another part of the daily routine.

Insulin injections

A strict routine of insulin injections will be needed, usually twice a day although some cats will only need one daily injection. It's quite often the thought of injecting their cat that worries owners but the needles that are used are only small. Cats usually won't feel anything and their vet or vet nurse will happily teach the owner how to perform the injections – no need to be



worried or squeamish!

Learning to inject your pet is simply a matter of confidence and once owners have started doing it regularly, it becomes second nature. Don't forget that cats are good at picking up on our emotions, so the more nervous you are about giving the injection, the more likely your cat is to sense there's something to be anxious about.

The exact treatment regime is often different from cat to cat, with different levels of insulin needed to stabilise the condition depending on many varying factors, which means a cat's diabetes is unlikely to be stabilised overnight. Once a diagnosis has been made it's a case of regular monitoring and testing the cat's blood glucose levels to check how well the disease is being controlled by the insulin, and allowing the dosage to be adjusted until the vet is happy it's under control.

Managing diabetic cat's weight

As well as a cat's weight being an important factor in managing feline diabetes once it has been diagnosed, obesity can actually be a cause of the disease. In fact, getting an overweight cat down to its ideal body weight can sometimes be all that's needed to resolve the diabetes! There are obviously countless other problems that are caused by a cat being obese, so it's always important to make sure our cats are an appropriate weight whether they have diabetes or not. Even if a diabetic cat isn't obese, their diet plays a crucial role in managing the disease and a very low carb diet has been shown to be extremely beneficial but, as with any change in diet, it's something you should take advice from your vet on.

Cat weight loss tips

- Work closely with your vet, because losing weight too rapidly can have severe consequences for a cat
- Adjust the amount you feed as advised by your vet
- Don't give your cat any extra treats;

Signs of Feline Diabetes

- Increased thirst
- Increased appetite
- Increased urination
- Lethargy
- Weakness



any 'treats' during the day should be taken out of your cat's regular daily food allowance

- Increase exercise levels slowly, making use of interactive toys to increase your cat's daily activity

Other lifestyle factors

Routine is especially important for a diabetic cat and factors that can have an effect on insulin levels include weight, food, and frequency of feeding, so as well as the routine of daily or twice-daily insulin injections, owners should follow a strict routine for feeding. Keeping a diary is usually recommended so vet and owner can work together to maximise a diabetic cat's treatment plan, recording things like insulin injections, the cat's weight, appetite, and general health/demeanour.

Adopting a diabetic cat

Tania Marsh, the Deputy Manager at Cats Protection's National Cat Adoption Centre (NCAC), explained the difficulties diabetic cats face when they're looking for a forever home:

"Here at the NCAC we often take diabetic cats into our care and they are one of the hardest groups of cats for us to rehome because of the nature of the condition and the restrictions it can bring to any new owners; they have to have a strict diet and very often two injections of insulin a day."

Tania confirmed that with good management of the condition, a diabetic cat can live for many years with a great quality of life and told me about two recent diabetic cats that were in the NCAC's care, Maxwell and Tippex.

Maxwell's story

12 year old Maxwell came into the NCAC after becoming unhappy when his owners moved from a big house with a garden to a flat, making him an indoor cat. Despite only recently being diagnosed as diabetic, Maxwell is a sweet and friendly cat just like any other, loving playtime and cuddles, and was adopted by a nurse who was happy to give him a loving family

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home, even though she would have to give him twice-daily injections as well as keep him on a special diet. While she obviously did have experience of needles and giving injections (albeit to humans, not cats!), staff at the NCAC gave her some training and she was able to adopt Maxwell with full confidence that she could easily manage his routine.

Tippex's story

Tippex was also newly diagnosed as diabetic when he came to the NCAC in January and immediately became known as a real character, sociable with other cats and dogs and very easy-going. So easy-going in fact, that his diabetes stabilised very quickly after coming into the centre, something quite unusual for diabetic cats because of the stress a new

environment can cause. Tippex was adopted by an experienced family from Somerset who had sadly lost their previous diabetic cat and were specifically looking for a cat with the same condition to offer a home to.

Maxwell and Tippex were both lucky to have been adopted but diabetic cats, like many other cats with special needs, are often overlooked when it comes to adoption. If you're looking to give a forever home to a rescue cat you can find out more about the cats still available for adoption at the NCAC by visiting the website here www.cats.org.uk/ncac/adopt-a-cat, or check out your local rescues. Special needs cats, from diabetic cats to FIV+ cats to tripod cats (cats with only three legs!), often struggle to find a home, but adopting them is always extremely rewarding.