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My dog has diabetes —now what?

With proper care, this common disease is actually quite manageable and dogs can maintain a good quality of life. Here's what you need to know.

What is it?

Diabetes mellitus is a condition that develops when the body doesn't produce enough insulin or the insulin that is produced isn't sufficient enough to regulate blood sugar levels. As a result, the body doesn't function as well as it should.

What are the clinical signs?

Dogs with diabetes tend to drink a lot of water, urinate frequently, have a ravenous appetite and often, despite the fact that they're eating more, can lose weight. In some dogs, if the disease isn't diagnosed soon enough, a serious condition known as ketoacidosis can develop and vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, lethargy and anorexia can occur.

How is it diagnosed?

The good news is that diabetes is easy and relatively inexpensive to diag-

nose. With a simple blood and urine test, your veterinarian can determine whether there's an elevated amount of sugar in your dog's body.

How is it treated?

Most of the time, when dogs are diagnosed with diabetes, they remain diabetic for life. So the goal of treatment is to control blood sugar levels, stop the clinical signs, stabilize the dog's weight and prevent the development of any complications. To do this, your veterinarian will make recommendations about a proper diet and feeding regimen and start your dog on insulin therapy twice a day.

What about follow-up monitoring?

After about a week of insulin therapy at home, your veterinarian will want to perform a glucose curve at the hospital. Over the course of the day, the veterinary team will take blood

samples to test your dog's blood sugar levels. Your pet's dose of insulin may need to be adjusted, depending on these results.

Once the ideal amount of insulin is established (and it may take a few glucose curves to get the right dose), your veterinarian may speak to you about monitoring your dog's blood sugar levels at home.

What is the prognosis for my pet?

Most dogs do very well and have a good quality of life with treatment. However, cataract development is very common in dogs with diabetes, even with proper home care and regular veterinary visits. The good news? Cataracts can be corrected surgically.

Information provided by Dr. David Bruyette, a board-certified veterinary internal medicine specialist.