

Diabetic Cat Diet

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As most of us know, proper dietary support of diabetes mellitus is very important in overall diabetes management. In cats, diabetes mellitus can actually be reversed if there has not been too much permanent pancreatic damage and if blood sugar can be regulated quickly, the cat can become normal. For cats, a low carbohydrate/high protein approach is the best route to accomplishing this goal.

Cats become diabetic when they experience sustained high blood sugar levels for too long. Genetics and diet aside, any cat can be made into a diabetic cat by subjecting the cat to repeated intravenous glucose infusions for a long enough time. Too much glucose in the bloodstream over time depletes the pancreas of insulin and eventually creates an insulin deficiency (which is basically what diabetes mellitus is).

In a more natural setting where repeated intravenous glucose infusions do not occur, the problem is a high carbohydrate diet. When we eat carbohydrates and they enter our bodies, there is a rise in blood sugar level that persists for several hours. In the cat, it is more like 8-12 hours, even longer if the cat is obese. All this circulating blood sugar stimulates insulin secretion so that all sugar can be stored in the body. If the cat is snacking on dry food throughout the day, he or she may be secreting insulin throughout the day as well. This makes for a fat cat and a depleted pancreas.

Over-eating high carbohydrate diets promotes development of diabetes mellitus and creates obesity. Obesity itself further promotes development of diabetes mellitus.

Additional Resources

- [Diabetes Mellitus: Introduction](#)
- [Cataracts in Diabetic Dogs](#)
- [Diabetic Ketoacidosis in Dogs and Cats](#)
- [Diabetic Dog Diet](#)
- [Glargine \(Lantus\) and Detemir \(Levemir\) Insulin](#)
- [Insulin Administration in Cats](#)
- [Insulin Administration in Dogs](#)
- [Insulin Alternatives](#)
- [Monitoring Glucose Regulation in Dogs and Cats](#)
- [Hard to Regulate Diabetic Cats](#)
- [Hard to Regulate Diabetic Dogs](#)
- [Home Testing of Blood Glucose for Diabetic Cats](#)

We have mentioned that a diabetic cat can become normal if blood sugar levels are returned to normal and kept normal for a long enough time. This cannot usually be done without insulin injections but diet is important as well. We need to minimize the post-meal



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glucose tide that contributed to the cat's diabetes and this is best done with a low-carbohydrate, high protein diet. If the cat is overweight, the amount should be tailored to induce weight loss. Kibbled diets require a minimum amount of carbohydrate to produce their shape and consistency but canned foods are not hampered by this carbohydrate limitation. This means that canned food more often fits the bill but there are several therapeutic dry diets made for diabetic cats should dry food be strongly desired by either cat or human caregiver. The following guidelines have been suggested for diabetic cats:

- Obese cats require weight loss to achieve regulation. High protein/low carbohydrate diets are excellent for this purpose. Once an appropriate food has been selected, equal amounts should be fed in approximately three to four small meals daily if possible. Feeding in meals discourages snacking and helps with weight loss. It is best not to leave a food bowl out for snacking.
- Obese cats should not lose more than two percent of their body weight per week. If they do, they are at high risk for developing [hepatic lipidosis](#), a form of liver failure. This is a serious complication and should be avoided. If your cat is losing weight too quickly, notify your veterinarian.
- The diet in question should be relatively high in arginine. Arginine is an amino acid that is stimulatory to the pancreatic beta cells that secrete insulin. Most meat-based proteins are high in arginine.
- The diet in question should be relatively high in L-carnitine, a biochemical which assists in transporting fats into cells to facilitate metabolism.

There are several therapeutic diets designed specifically to meet these guidelines. Ask your veterinarian which one is best for your cat. In general, canned diets are felt to be superior in protein:carbohydrate ratios; however, there are dry foods available for diabetic cats. If it is not possible to change to a diet designed for diabetic cat health, it may be possible to feed another commercial canned food. Alternatively, a professional nutritionist can devise a home made diet if one feels more comfortable with this route.

Related resources

- [Insulin Administration in Cats - February 18, 2021](#) 
- [Insulin Administration in Dogs - January 19, 2021](#) 
- [Hard to Regulate Diabetic Dogs - September 2, 2020](#) 
- [Diabetic Ketoacidosis in Dogs and Cats - August 31, 2020](#) 

- [Monitoring Glucose Regulation in Dogs and Cats - March 31, 2020](#) 
- [Insulin Alternatives - October 15, 2019](#) 
- [Cataracts in Diabetic Dogs - August 25, 2019](#) 
- [Glargine \(Lantus\) and Detemir \(Levemir\) Insulin - August 6, 2019](#) 
- [Diabetes Mellitus: Introduction - May 19, 2019](#) 
- [Hard to Regulate Diabetic Cats - August 20, 2018](#) 
- [Diabetic Dog Diet - May 3, 2018](#) 
- [Home Testing of Blood Glucose for Diabetic Cats - November 24, 2014](#) 

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