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What you need to know about™ The overweight cat and diabetes

Common signs of diabetes

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Tiredness, lack of energy
- Vomiting
- Weight loss

Overweight cats are most at risk for diabetes.

Healthy rewards besides food

Providing food is not the only way to express love and affection for our feline friends. They also enjoy spending time with their families and in other activities, some of which can help with a weight management program. For starters, see what you can devise to keep your cat moving – even a little exercise can make a difference! Visit PetFit.com for some fun tips.

- Praise & attention
- Exercise
- Toys & games
- Massage

REFERENCES

1. Prevalence and risk factors for obesity in adult cats from private U.S. veterinary practices. Lund EM, Armstrong PJ, Kirk CA, et al. *Int J Appl Res Vet Med* 3:88-96, 2005.
2. Health status and population characteristics of dogs and cats examined at private veterinary practices in the United States. Lund EM, Armstrong PJ, Kirk CA, et al. *JAVMA* 214:1336-1341, 1999.

Chubby and sweet may not be so healthy! Overweight or obese cats are more susceptible to a wide range of health problems.¹ For example, obese cats are nearly 4 times more likely to develop diabetes mellitus,² a complex disease that can damage systems throughout the body. During normal digestion, carbohydrates, fats, and proteins are broken down into smaller components. Glucose (sugar), a smaller form of carbohydrate, is the main fuel for energy. In diabetic cats, either the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or the body does not use insulin properly for metabolizing glucose. When the body is not able to use glucose, the resulting high levels of sugar in the blood can be dangerous and cause systemic damage.

Individualized weight management

A weight loss program and maintaining a healthy weight can help prevent diabetes. Also, both of these strategies can help you manage diabetes if your cat has been diagnosed with it. For weight loss, a veterinary-recommended low-calorie, low-fat, high-fiber food works well; or the metabolism can be altered with a low-carbohydrate and high-protein food. Fortunately, weight loss for both healthy and diabetic cats can be successfully managed with either type of food. Because individual patients respond differently, your veterinarian will work with you to determine the best choice for weight loss, weight maintenance, and glucose control if your cat is diabetic.

Obesity risks

- Diabetes
- Arthritis & other joint diseases
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Skin problems
- Shortened life expectancy

Calorie restriction with low-calorie, low-fat, high-fiber foods – Calorie restriction can be obtained by providing foods that are low in fat and calories with higher fiber levels that provide a feeling of fullness and reduce the problem of begging. Moderately high fiber levels also can help maintain a healthy weight and minimize blood sugar fluctuations.

Altering metabolism with low-carbohydrate, high-protein foods – Cats burn soluble carbohydrates in the form of glucose as their first available energy source. When the intake of carbohydrates is sufficiently restricted, fats and proteins become the primary source of energy. This change in metabolism results in weight loss as well as glucose control for a diabetic cat.

Diabetes tips

The food your pet eats plays an important role in his or her overall health and well-being. Managing diabetes mellitus is a long-term commitment, but well worth the effort. Some of the keys to keeping a diabetic pet healthy are establishing a routine of feeding and exercise; providing a stable, stress-free lifestyle; and giving medications if necessary. Monitoring and support by your veterinarian will help fine-tune treatment plans as needed to optimize your pet's health and quality of life. ■