

It Can Take Years to Resolve This, so Go the 'Ounce of Prevention' Route

New proof that an ounce of prevention is so much better than a pound of cure! But hurry, because once too much water passes under the dam, it's very expensive, time-consuming, and highly improbable that you'll resolve this cellular 'starvation' issue.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Diabetes in cats is almost always preventable through diet and exercise
- Most cases of diabetes in cats occur in middle-aged or older, overweight or obese kitties fed a dry food diet
- Other contributing factors include a sedentary lifestyle and over-vaccination
- The perfect nutrition for most cats, including diabetic kitties is a fresh food diet containing no grain-based starch
- Disease prevention should always be the goal, not only for the health and well-being of your cat, but also because managing the care of a diabetic pet can be time consuming and expensive

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published August 16, 2016.

A rather surprising article about managing feline diabetes naturally was published at an online pet site that offers primarily mainstream, traditional veterinary advice. It was encouraging to see the author emphasize the need for pet parents to focus on diet and exercise.

"The two best things any cat parent can help do to protect from diabetes," writes veterinarian Dr. Tara Koble of The Cat Doctor Veterinary Hospital, in Boise, Idaho, "would be to feed the highest quality canned, low-carb or raw diet that is possible."

"The second critical thing to help prevent diabetes," continues Koble, "is to get your cat moving. Exercise is protective against diabetes, and indoor only cats are usually lacking severely in activity."¹

It's important to note that Koble is discussing diet and exercise as a way to prevent diabetes in cats, since once the disease takes hold, many kitties require insulin in addition to diet and lifestyle adjustments.

Insulin is an anabolic hormone whose job is to move sugar, amino acids, electrolytes and fatty acids into the cells of your pet's body. A lack of insulin will cause these vital substances to remain outside the cells. This causes the cells to starve while surrounded by the very nutrients they need to survive.

If there is enough insulin being produced in your cat's body, but the cells don't use the nutrients they receive properly (they become resistant), the result is the same — cells starved for nutrients.

Diabetes Most Often Seen in Overweight Cats on Dry Food Diets

Sadly, feline diabetes rates have skyrocketed over the last decade. The disease is most often seen in overweight and obese adult cats fed dry food diets.

Since dry food is biologically inappropriate nutrition for cats (high in carbs and deficient in high-quality protein), it makes sense that a lifetime of eating the stuff could cause diabetes in mature kitties.

If feline diabetes is diagnosed early and everyone in the cat's life is committed to bringing the disease under control, it's possible to normalize blood glucose levels and put the diabetes into remission — which means the kitty will no longer need to be on insulin or other medications.

But unfortunately, in cats who have been diabetic for a significant period of time, the cells in the pancreas may be worn out and unable to secrete insulin any longer. In this case, the animal may require lifelong insulin therapy.

3 Major Causes of Diabetes in Cats

1. **Obesity/high carbohydrate diets — Obesity** is far and away the predominant cause of feline diabetes. The majority of cats in the U.S. consume a high calorie, high carbohydrate diet, even though they have no physiological requirement for grains like corn, wheat, rice, soy, millet or quinoa as sources of energy.

Grain-free dry foods have simply confused the issue and also contribute to the obesity and diabetes epidemics we're seeing in pets. Although grain-free, these diets are calorie-dense and contain high glycemic potatoes, chickpeas, peas, or tapioca, which require a substantial insulin release from the body.

All the carbs (starch) in your cat's food — which can be as much as 80% of the contents — break down into sugar. Excess sugar can result in diabetes.

You can help your cat stay trim by feeding a portion controlled, moisture-rich, balanced, species-appropriate diet consisting of a variety of unadulterated protein sources and healthy fats, and specific nutritional supplements as necessary.

2. **Sedentary lifestyle** — Pet cats, especially indoor-only kitties, often lead the same sedentary lifestyle their humans do. It's not a total lack of movement — just not nearly enough of the kind that's beneficial for health.

If Mr. Whiskers is lying around the house all day while you're at work, his heart rate isn't being elevated for the 20 minutes per day he needs to achieve good cardiovascular conditioning.

Unless you're giving kitty enticements to be physically active, his exertion will be anaerobic — short bursts of energy followed by long periods of rest. Anaerobic exercise won't condition your pet's heart or muscles or burn the calories he consumes.

It's recommended to allot a minimum of 20 minutes of daily aerobic exercise for your pet. You will have to get creative with cats, but it can be done, usually through lots of feather chasing games.

3. **Too many vaccines** — There is a growing body of research that connects autoimmune disorders to Type II diabetes in dogs. Though, currently there are few if any similar studies in cats, it's best to err on the side of caution and assume the same is true for kitties.

Immune-mediated or autoimmune diseases are thought to be caused by overstimulation of the immune system. One of the primary ways your kitty's immune system can be overstimulated is through repetitive vaccinations against diseases she is already immunized against.

If your furry family member has had any vaccines in the past, there's a high likelihood her immunity to those diseases will last a lifetime. Each time a fully immunized pet receives a repetitive set of vaccines, it increases the risk of overstimulating the immune system.

If you're concerned about your cat's disease risk, find a veterinarian who runs titer tests to measure antibody response from previous vaccinations. Titer results will tell you whether vaccination is necessary, and for which specific diseases.

The Ideal Nutrition for All Cats, Including Cats with Diabetes

Unfortunately, many veterinarians continue to recommend commercial or prescription diets for diabetic cats that are entirely inappropriate. These foods typically contain a small amount of rendered protein and a tremendous amount of fiber and starch (carbs).

The theory behind these formulas is that low-fat diets force carnivores to burn excess body fat. The problem is that most cats with serious diabetes don't have any excess fat to burn. In addition, a diet deficient in high-quality protein will force your kitty's body to metabolize its own muscle, which contributes to muscle loss and the rear limb weakness characteristic of diabetic neuropathy.

The ideal nutrition for cats is whole, fresh, unprocessed animal meat, organs and bones, with a small amount of veggies. Unfortunately, since most of older cats with diabetes have spent their lives eating processed commercial pet food — typically kibble — it can be an insurmountable challenge to transition a sick kitty with little or no appetite to a new diet.

If this is the case with your cat, add as much grain/potato-free canned cat food as possible to your pet's normal diet. The important thing is to ensure your kitty is eating well each day, and if that means continuing to feed him dry cat food, that's what you should do.

Just make sure to also encourage him to eat some canned food as well for the added protein and moisture it provides. With proper treatment (which almost always includes dietary changes), many diabetic cats can achieve remission.

The biggest contributor to feline diabetes is, of course, obesity. Pets become overweight through a combination of an inappropriate diet, lack of portion control, and not enough calorie-burning physical activity. If you want to do everything possible to prevent diabetes in your cat, you should focus on keeping her lean. Feed a portion-controlled, moisture-rich, species-appropriate diet and make sure she gets some exercise each day.

Feline Diabetes Is Entirely Preventable in Most Cases

Treatment of diabetes in cats is complex and time consuming. It involves regular monitoring of blood glucose levels, ongoing dietary adjustments, insulin given by injection or oral glucose-regulating drugs, and keeping a constant, careful eye on your sick kitty.

Frequent vet visits are a way of life, and the cost of checkups, tests, medical procedures and insulin therapy add up fast. Pet insurance provider Trupanion reports that treatment for diabetes, including regular blood work and long-term medication, can cost in excess of \$10,000 over the life of the animal.²

Needless to say, the toll the disease takes on your pet's health and quality of life can be devastating. So for the sake of your precious feline family member, it's important to give serious consideration to the importance of nutrition, exercise, and maintaining your pet at a healthy weight in preventing diabetes and other serious diseases.

Sources and References

¹ [PetMD](#)

² [Trupanion, May 16, 2011 \(Archived\)](#)
