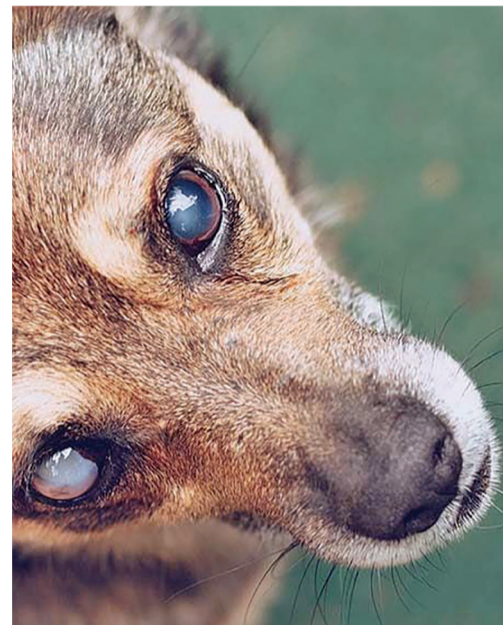




Dogs with diabetes can lack energy or appear depressed.



Kelera Vakaleba, Animals Fiji Medical Team, injecting a cat.



Cloudy eyes can be a symptom of diabetes in dogs.

ANIMALS FIJI

Animals Get Diabetes Just Like People Do



Opinion



Mary-Anne Fiebig

Mary-Anne is a volunteer on assignment with Animals Fiji as part of the Australian Volunteers Program, an Australian Government Initiative.

Recently, at the Animals Fiji Savusavu Clinic, a couple bought in their cat of six years. They told the veterinary staff that even though the cat had been eating well, it appeared to be losing weight, was not as active as it used to be, and seemed to be weaker. The couple were most concerned and clearly loved the animal.

The Animals Fiji visiting volunteer Veterinarian (Vet), Dr Lachlan, asked them if the cat had been drinking a lot more and urinating more, and the couple agreed that it had. This answer caused the Vet to

suspect that the cat may have diabetes and proceeded to take blood and urine samples to check if this was the case.

Yes, dogs, cats and even farm animals get diabetes, just like humans do. It is common in middle-aged cats and dogs. Being told that your animal has diabetes is scary. Diabetes is usually a lifelong condition that requires constant care by the pet parents to control it. But the good news is that it can be managed, and pets with diabetes can continue to have a long and healthy life.

WHAT IS DIABETES?

Insulin is a chemical in animals that breaks down sugar from the food that is eaten so the food can be used for energy. Diabetes is a condition where the body either doesn't produce insulin (Type 1 diabetes) – or it does produce insulin, but the body doesn't use it properly (Type 2 diabetes).

While diabetes in animals is not common in Fiji, being informed about the condition can be valuable. Here is some information that may come in handy.

What causes diabetes and what are the signs in a cat or a dog?

There isn't a single cause of diabetes. It could be genetic, or due to the animal being overweight. Sometimes, if the animal has another disease or has been on steroids for another disease, it may cause the animal to develop diabetes. Diabetes causes an increase in blood sugar to levels that the kidneys cannot handle, and sugar levels then increase in the animal's urine.

THE USUAL SIGNS THAT YOUR DOG OR CAT HAS DIABETES ARE:

1. Drinking and urinating more:

This is because the kidneys cannot do the job of re-absorbing wa-

ter into the bloodstream properly, so the animal is thirstier, drinks more water, and needs to urinate more.

2. Eating more:

As the body isn't absorbing sugar properly, energy is not getting to the body cells. The animal will still feel hungry and eat more to get the energy it needs.

3. Losing weight:

Because the body isn't able to process the food it is eating, it will lose weight.

Other signs can include vomiting or a dull or poor coat condition. Dogs can develop cataracts in their eyes and cats can develop an unusual walk or gait. Your dog or cat may seem to lack energy or even appear depressed.

If left untreated, diabetes can cause liver issues, which can be life-threatening. If your animal is vomiting or disorientated, take them immediately to the veterinary clinic.

How is an animal tested for diabetes and how is it treated?

Testing is usually simple blood and urine tests, as both will need to show an increase in sugar levels. Diabetes affects animals differently, and the severity of symptoms will vary, so accurate assessment is necessary to provide the best treatment. The sooner diabetes is diagnosed and treatment starts, the more likely your pet will lead a normal life.

Treatments depend on the type of diabetes, but insulin injections are usually the primary treatment in dogs and cats. Most owners worry about giving their animals an injection, but it is only a tiny needle twice daily and a small amount is given, and the pet usually doesn't mind.

It may take some time to get the

correct insulin dosage for your animal, so you will need to be patient. The Vet will explain what you need to do and help you learn how to inject the animal. Also, to understand how to monitor the animal's blood sugar levels. This may be confusing at first but it will get easier with time.

Will there be changes needed in my animal's diet?

Every animal's requirements are different so each animal will be treated differently. Your Vet will recommend the best diet for your animal. Usually, this will include good quality protein (meat and eggs) as well as fibre (vegetables and fruit) and carbohydrates (starches). They also may recommend a low-fat diet as well. Treats should be kept to a minimum, with some recommending that no treats be given outside of mealtimes.

What is essential is that the dog or cat receives its insulin injection every 12 hours with its meal. If you miss an injection – wait until the next one is due. Injections given too close together can cause a sharp decrease in blood sugar levels and this can be deadly to your cat or dog.

Since the insulin dose is related to the amount of food given, it is important that the same amount of food is given at the same time each day. For dogs this is especially important.

MANAGING YOUR ANIMAL'S DIABETES

Although at first it may seem challenging, you can successfully manage a cat or dog with diabetes. You become their caregiver. This includes daily injections, monitoring of their blood glucose levels and ensuring they have a balanced diet at the same time each day.

For dogs, exercise is important,

so have a moderate and consistent exercise routine, like a twice-daily walk for 15 – 30 minutes at a moderate pace. Ensure you have water for your dog while you walk.

Adjusting to this new routine takes time. It will take time and working closely with your Vet to get the correct insulin dose for your pet and for you to understand glucose levels. It is a learning process that requires patience and commitment. You also will need to be very careful to notice any changes in your animal's behaviour.

In conclusion

If you suspect that your dog or cat may have diabetes or if you notice any concerning symptoms, it is important to consult with your veterinary clinic for proper diagnosis and treatment as soon as you can. Blood and urine tests can confirm if your pet has diabetes and determine the most effective treatment for them. Regular check-ups are crucial for managing diabetes in animals effectively.

Source: Animals Fiji

must read

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As a non-profit charity, Animals Fiji depends on the kindness of donations to continue in their work to support animals across Fiji.

To find out more about Animals Fiji's services and how you can help please contact their Savusavu Clinic at (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi Clinic at (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at www.animalsfiji.org.

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