

Dog Diabetes Warning Signs

Early diagnosis will help you manage your dog's glucose levels.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q: My 8-year-old Afghan Hound, Gala, began drinking an unusually large amount of water a few years ago, and started losing weight shortly after. Lately, her eyes are not looking right and she has lost interest in many of her normal activities. Could these be signs that she has diabetes?

A: Gala has some classic signs of diabetes, but other diseases can cause similar symptoms. Ask your veterinarian to test your dog's urine for glucose. A positive test with high glucose levels usually indicates diabetes in dogs.

Classic signs of diabetes in dogs include weight loss (even though food intake may be regular), increased drinking and urinating, and eventually dehydration, lethargy and loss of appetite. This all starts with increased glucose in the bloodstream because the pancreas is not secreting insulin to pull the glucose into the cells. Eventually the body's metabolism changes and the blood becomes acidic (known as diabetic ketoacidosis, or DKA), making your dog very sick. Cataracts, or the clouding of the eye lens, is also a sign of diabetes.

Fortunately, diabetes is very treatable. You need to work with a veterinarian to determine a dose of insulin, but usually a small injection twice a day can keep your dog's blood sugar under control. The more closely you monitor your dog's glucose levels with your veterinarian, the better the outcome. Dogs can live for years with diabetes with proper insulin dosing.

It's important that you take steps immediately to diagnose the condition and begin treatment. In mild cases, a diet change may be enough to control it. In serious cases, hospitalization and intravenous fluids may be required.

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