

Whoa – A 900% Increase in One Disease in Just Five Years – What's Going On?

According to this pet insurance company, there's been an astonishing 900% increase in this over just the past five years. Find out the breeds most affected, the single most common symptom and eight telling hints of trouble. So you can nip it with these strategies today.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs and cats in the U.S. aren't the only ones suffering an obesity epidemic and all the diseases that go with it
- In the U.K., overweight and obese pets are acquiring diabetes at a skyrocketing rate — a 900% increase in just five years
- Symptoms of diabetes in pets include increased thirst, urination and appetite; fatigue; vision problems and urinary tract infections
- Obesity is by far the biggest reason pets become diabetic. Your pet has no biological requirement for grains or most other carbohydrates (starches), yet carbs can be as much as 80% of the ingredient content of processed pet food
- Preventing diabetes in your pet should be the goal, through proper diet, adequate vigorous exercise and minimal vaccinations

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Sadly, it seems pets in the U.K. are experiencing an obesity epidemic similar to the problem here in the U.S. According to pet insurance company Animal Friends, there has been an astonishing 900% increase in **diabetes in pets** in the U.K. in just the last five years.¹

In a study of 9,000 pets, the company found that cats have experienced a 1,161% increase since 2011, and dogs an 850% increase. In 2011, just 309 U.K. cats and dogs were diagnosed with diabetes. By 2015, the number had climbed to 2,877.

The British Shorthair is the most commonly diagnosed cat breed with diabetes, followed by the Burmese, Foreign Shorthair, Maine Coon and Abyssinian. In dogs, the disease is most often seen in West Highland Terriers, followed by Labrador Retrievers, King Charles Spaniels, Huskies and Miniature Schnauzers.

The diabetes rate in humans in the U.K. is nearly four times what it was in 1980. According to Westley Pearson of Animal Friends:

"With weight issues and diabetes on the rise amongst humans, we assumed we would find the same in people's pets but the 900 percent increase we uncovered was shocking."²

While pet diabetes numbers in the U.S. aren't quite so dire, they're certainly nothing to crow about. According to Banfield Pet Hospital's State of Pet Health 2016 Report, over the last 10 years, the disease has increased 80% in dogs, and 18% in kitties.³

How Pets Get Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes, the form of the disease that strikes the young, is rare in companion animals.

Your cat or dog is much more likely to develop Type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes around middle age or in his senior years, as a result of a lifestyle that leads to decreased production of insulin or the inability of the body to use it efficiently (insulin resistance).

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.

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

Obesity is by far the biggest reason pets become diabetic. Your pet has no biological requirement for grains or most other carbohydrates (starches), yet carbs can be as much as 80% of the ingredient content of processed pet food. Carbs turn into sugar in your pet's body and excess sugar leads to diabetes.

Unfortunately, starch is required for the dry food manufacturing process, so even "grain-free" foods contain an abundance of sugar in the form of tapioca, potato, pea and other legumes that stress your pet's pancreas.

Another lifestyle-related reason pets develop diabetes, one that often goes hand-in-hand with poor nutrition, is lack of physical activity.

Eight Symptoms of Diabetes

The symptoms of diabetes can develop very gradually, and include the following:

- **Increased urination and thirst** — The first thing that often happens is blood sugar levels become so high outside the cells of your pet's body that it spills into the urine, increasing urine production. You might notice your dog or cat is urinating more frequently or is having accidents in the house.

Increased urination causes an increase in thirst, so you might also notice your pet emptying his water dish more often. Increased thirst and urination are hallmarks of a diabetic condition, so those are things you'll want to watch closely for, especially as your pet ages.

Unfortunately, increased thirst and urine output are also signs of other serious health problems, so regardless of the age or condition of your dog or cat, you should make an appointment with your veterinarian if you notice these symptoms.

- **Increased appetite** — Another symptom you might notice is increased appetite. Your pet will be hungrier because the amino acids needed inside the cells aren't getting there, or aren't being used appropriately.

- **Weight loss** — When the cells of your pet's body are being starved of essential nutrients, the result is often an increase in appetite. But because the energy from food is not being used efficiently by the body's cells, your pet can lose weight even though he's taking in more calories.
- **Tiredness and lack of energy** — Other symptoms you might notice in your dog or cat are lethargy and lack of energy. When the cells of your pet's body are deprived of blood sugar, he will often exhibit a general lack of desire to run, take a walk with you or engage in play.

Lack of activity and an increased need for sleep are typical in animals suffering from Type 2 diabetes.

- **Vision problems** — Another symptom of diabetes in companion animals is blindness, which is seen primarily in dogs, but cats can also lose their eyesight as a result of diabetic cataracts.
- **Weakness in rear limbs** — This symptom is unique to cats with diabetes. It's called the plantigrade stance.

Instead of walking high up on the pads of his feet, which is the way cats normally walk, a cat with plantigrade stance will drop his hind quarters low and actually walk on his back ankles.

This is a very obvious and unnatural way for a kitty to walk, so it's something you'll notice immediately. Fortunately, this symptom can be reversed once the diabetes is under control.

- **Urinary tract infections** — It's not at all uncommon for diabetic dogs and cats to acquire secondary **urinary tract infection**. This happens because the more sugar there is in the urine, the greater the likelihood that bacteria will grow in your pet's bladder.
- **Kidney failure** — Kidney failure, especially in cats, is also a common secondary symptom of diabetes. Often the first diagnosis for a diabetic kitty is chronic renal insufficiency or acute kidney problems.

The sugar that is meant to be retained in your pet's bloodstream but spills over into the urine is very damaging to the kidneys.

Three Ways to Help Your Pet Avoid Diabetes

1. You can help your dog or cat stay trim by feeding a portion-controlled, moisture rich, balanced and species-appropriate diet consisting of a variety of unadulterated protein sources, healthy fats, low-starch veggies and fruit in moderation and specific nutritional supplements as necessary. These foods are only found in the freezer section of your favorite pet boutique! (or you can prepare them at home).
2. Your pet needs regular heart-thumping, muscle-toning and calorie-burning exercise. If your dog or cat is lying around the house all day while you're at work, her heart rate is not being elevated often or consistently enough to burn calories and achieve good cardiovascular conditioning.

Unless you're actively exercising your dog or cat, her 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 she consumes. A minimum of 20 minutes of daily aerobic exercise is the bare-bones minimum for your pet, as animals were meant to move their bodies a lot more this.

3. Studies link autoimmune disorders to Type 2 diabetes, especially in dogs. If your pet's immune system attacks his pancreas, he can develop diabetes. Dogs, in particular, are prone to immune system attacks on the pancreas, or more specifically, the cells that secrete insulin in the pancreas.

Autoimmune diseases can be the result of overstimulation of the immune system. One of the primary ways your pet's immune system is overstimulated is through repetitive yearly vaccinations against diseases he is already immunized against.

If your pet had his full set of puppy or kitten shots on schedule, there's a high likelihood his 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 his immune system.

Find an **integrative or holistic veterinarian** who runs antibody titer tests to measure each animal's antibody response from previous vaccinations. Titer results will tell you whether re-vaccination is necessary.

Prevention Is Always the Best Cure

Treatment of diabetes in a family pet is complex and time consuming in the vast majority of cases. 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 pet.

Frequent veterinary visits are a way of life, and the cost of checkups, tests, medical procedures and insulin therapy add up fast. Needless to say, the toll the disease takes on your pet's health and quality of life can be devastating. That's why you must take steps to remove any obstacles in the way of a lifetime of good health for your four-legged family member.

Sources and References

¹ [Animal Friends](#)

² [The Telegraph, May 16, 2016](#)

³ [Banfield State of Pet Health Report 2016 \(Archived\)](#)
