**Diabetes in Dogs and Cats**

Diabetes mellitus is the insufficient release or inability to use insulin to regulate blood sugar. Insulin is made in the pancreas, so sometimes other pancreatic problems or endocrine issues can occur with diabetes. If the pancreas cannot produce insulin to break down sugars and carbohydrates, then the best first line of defense is to eliminate sugars from the diet.

Grains, such as rice, wheat, and corn, can cause difficulties in animals as they are forms of sugar that insulin has to process. Similarly, roots, such as carrots and potatoes, as well as sweets and starches (like pasta) will also need to be managed by insulin.

Symptoms of diabetes include excessive drinking of water and increased urination. This is the body’s way of trying to dilute out the high sugar in the blood. Disorientation, grumpiness, obesity, sluggishness, rapid weight loss, or decreased muscle strength are other symptoms.

Cataracts and diabetic nerve damage as well as delayed wound healing can all be secondary effects of uncontrolled high blood sugar. If severe enough, ketosis can occur. This means that the body mobilizes fat because it cannot utilize carbohydrates for energy. The byproducts from this change in metabolism create a stupor-induced, very sickly patient who can decline rapidly without emergency intervention.

Certain prescription drugs can contribute to insulin resistance, especially after long-term use, such as the steroid prednisone. Obesity and diets high in carbohydrates are also common culprits that can predispose an animal to develop diabetes. Other disease processes can increase the body’s natural steroids, such as stress, pain from stiff joints or arthritis, anxiety, and Cushing’s disease. Elevations of natural steroids in the body can also contribute to elevations in blood sugar by decreasing insulin sensitivity.

Many cat patients can come off insulin when carbs are cut from their diet. Cats are, after all, obligate carnivores. They should be eating meat that is highly digestible with a high moisture content.

Dogs often will need to stay on insulin therapy. However, this could change with food therapy. Both cats and dogs respond well to acupuncture and Chinese herbal formulas for diabetes. Some may be able to regulate on these alone, if caught early. They are also a nice adjunctive treatment when having difficulty regulating blood sugar while already on insulin.