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Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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a diabetic are: age – this is usually (but not always) a disease of mature cats; obesity; inactivity; diet; other disease, particularly infection;

gender; and breed. Some of these factors we have some control over and some are obviously set in stone. Our typical diabetic will be an 11 year old male desexed Burmese who is overweight, inactive, has dental disease and is on a predominantly dry food diet. We can't change the first three descriptors here, but weight, activity, other disease conditions, and especially diet are things we can take control of. Most of these factors are guilty of preventing the cat's tissues from responding properly to the insulin.

Occasionally, we will see a cat with an underlying problem of the pancreas, which interferes with their ability to actually produce the right amount of insulin in the first place.

In most cases the diagnosis is made with a combination of blood and urine testing, and thorough evaluation to rule out other complicating factors. Treatment will almost always involve giving injections of insulin, although there is a significant percentage of cats who, with the right treatment and diet adjustments, will be able to come entirely off the insulin in time. Many people are initially intimidated and scared at the thought of treating a diabetic cat – in particular the thought of giving injections, but they almost always end up saying that injections are easier than giving a tablet!! The initial period of treatment is quite a commitment, and there will be a number of trips to the vet until the blood sugar levels are stabilised. This varies from cat to cat, and we can't necessarily guarantee a quick period of stabilisation. It is extremely important that Puss has regular monitoring of his blood glucose levels throughout the day, firstly to ensure the insulin is working, and secondly to ensure the levels are not dropping too low. If the blood glucose level drops below a certain threshold, this can be dangerous. Once the owner is comfortable with the routine of giving the insulin, we like to try to get them to do some blood sugar readings at home with a glucometer, just like human diabetics, although you can't use just any machine – they don't all work as well for cats! This tends to reduce the stress of constant vet visits and some of the costs.

Occasionally we will see a very sick diabetic cat, who requires more intensive care with intravenous fluids and potentially other treatments. So if you notice Kitty is showing any of the signs mentioned above, then it really is better to have them checked sooner rather than later, for their sake as well as yours!

Ultimately, most cats who are diagnosed with diabetes are able to lead normal, happy and otherwise healthy lives, for their usual expected lifespan. Diabetes is just one of their nine lives, leaving them eight others to work through!!

Brrrr... time to get the winter woollies out with these chilly days and nights... and inexplicably, this seems to be the season when we are more likely to diagnose diabetes (diabetes mellitus is its formal name), in our feline patients. The most typical signs we see are increased thirst and urination, as well as weight loss despite an excellent appetite. Diabetic cats are otherwise usually 'healthy' in themselves, although if left too long they can present very sick indeed.

So what is diabetes and how does it work? This article will be a brief overview only, as this condition has many facets and is quite complicated. Basically diabetes is where the body is unable to utilise its sugar (glucose), due to lack of insulin (a hormone produced in the pancreas), or lack of response to the insulin. Think of sugar as the body's main energy source, which is carried in the blood stream to the cells (like petrol for a car). Glucose mainly comes from the diet, and for cats their main source of energy is protein. Too much carbohydrate can overload the body with sugar. The sugar can only get into the cells with the help of insulin (this is the petrol pump), otherwise it has to stay in the bloodstream. When the blood sugar levels get too high, it spills over into the urine, to try to get rid of the excess, and then this sugar drags extra water with it like a sponge. When this happens the cat will start urinating a lot more, and have to drink extra to make up the body water deficit. The body is also effectively starving, as the cells can't use the sugar which is stuck in the bloodstream, and so the poor cat is constantly hungry. When the diabetes becomes more serious, the body starts to use its own tissues for an energy source, first the fats, then the proteins. The by-products of this process can be very harmful and if left untreated, the cat will be very sick.

Why does a cat become diabetic? There are quite a lot of factors involved in this, and is usually a combination of the pancreas not producing enough insulin, and the tissues of the body not being as responsive to the insulin that is there as they should be. Predisposing factors to becoming

