

Campaign Promotes Pet Diabetes Awareness

World Diabetes Day spotlights the condition that affects adults, children, dogs, and cats.

Posted: November 14, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

Those balls, Frisbees, toys, and play strings that pets like to chase after might be helpful in warding off diabetes. To raise awareness about the disease – which today affects approximately one out of every 400 cats and dogs – World Diabetes Day on Nov. 14 aims to inform pet owners about the warning signs and treatments.

The campaign brings diabetes to light as a serious condition that afflicts not only adults and children, but pets as well. Designated as an official United Nations World Health Day, it draws attention to the growing prevalence of diabetes.

No one is certain of what has caused the increase of diabetes in pets, though obesity is the top consideration, according to WebVet.com, an online resource for pet owners.

In cats and dogs, the disease tends to affect those who are middle aged; however, it can begin in any life stage. In dogs, it is more common in females and in certain breeds, such as the Keeshond, Puli, Miniature Pinscher, and Cairn Terrier.

Male and female cats of all breeds can be affected and seem to be equally at risk, according to WebVet.com. As with humans, the most common factor driving diabetes in pets is weight, with approximately 25 percent of cats and dogs classified as clinically obese.

Early detection and treatment is key. Common signs and symptoms for pet owners to watch for include: Excessive consumption of water. Urinating more than usual. With cats, they might urinate out of the box and with dogs, they might break housetraining. Increased appetite. Dramatic weight loss. Poorly healing wounds.

Once a pet is diagnosed with diabetes, treatment includes: Diet, exercise, and weight loss for extremely mild cases, though insulin injections are needed in most cases in order to keep blood glucose levels in the normal range. A fixed, balanced diet, divided equally into morning and evening portions. Removing snacks and table food from your pet's diet, as they interfere with the proper regulation of glucose levels. Consistent exercise for your pet. Regular visits to the veterinarian for blood glucose tests.

Pet owners are urged to make sure their animals see a vet at least once a year. Middle-aged and senior cats and dogs should have vet check-ups twice a year.

The Nov. 14 date designated as World Diabetes Day marks the birthday of Frederick Banting who, along with Charles Best, first conceived the idea that led to the discovery of insulin in 1921. Diabetes affects 246 million people globally, including nearly 21 million children and adults in the United States.

- Get tips for living with a diabetic dog -