

## No Longer a Death Sentence for Your Dog

**New research offers hope for controlling diabetes in dogs.**

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Three dogs with different symptoms and the same disease: Melody, a 13-year-old Samoyed, began drinking a lot more water than usual. She urinated more, and her owner, Kerry Meydam of Toronto, noticed she was listless. Eubie's owner, Dianne Prout of Lynchburg, Virginia, was mopping up the first urine accident the 7-year-old Tibetan Spaniel had in the house when she noticed with alarm it was tinged with blood. Targa had no appetite and was losing weight, and when the 13-year-old Labrador Retriever mix grew weak in the hindquarters, her owner, Anne Backus of Nashville, Tennessee, feared her dog had cancer.

All three dogs have diabetes mellitus, also called sugar diabetes, which affects dogs, cats and humans.

Many people, like Prout, are shocked and dismayed to hear their dog's diagnosis. "It sounded almost like a death sentence," she said. But Eubie, now 9, has a good-quality, active life, as do most diabetic dogs given proper treatment. New research in dietary therapy and use of trace minerals to better control the disease offer hope of decreased insulin dosing and improved health. Insulin replacement with a pill instead of an injection may become available within the next few years, a fact needle-shy owners and dogs will appreciate.

Any dog has some chance of developing diabetes, but the disease has definite risk patterns with respect to age, breed and gender. Diabetic dogs are usually middle-aged to older, with most diagnosed between ages 7 and 9. Female dogs are twice as likely to become diabetic as males, including spayed and neutered animals, though it is not known why. Overweight or obese dogs are definitely prone to developing diabetes. Maintaining normal weight in a dog may be the most important thing an owner can do to try to prevent diabetes.

The genetics of diabetes are not well understood. In dogs it is not usually inherited, but the disease strikes some breeds more often than others. Poodles, Dachshunds, Miniature Schnauzers and Beagles are frequently affected, but this may in part be a reflection of the breeds' popularity as numbers of the dogs rise, so do the numbers of diabetic dogs.

Other popular breeds, however, such as Rottweilers and Cocker Spaniels, have a lower risk of diabetes. Keeshonds, Pulik, Cairn Terriers and Miniature Pinschers may be genetically predisposed.