

## “Managing the Diabetic Patient Under COVID-19 Restrictions”

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Under the latest COVID-19 guidance from the RCVS, it is necessary to try and manage all non-emergency patients remotely wherever possible. Stable diabetic patients are not an emergency, but still require regular check-ups and veterinary care to ensure that they don't develop ketoacidosis and become an emergency. This guide offers some tips on how to manage diabetic patients during current restrictions.

### Communication with the Owners

- Arrange for a vet or nurse telephone/video consult in place of regular practice visits.
- Always make sure the owners are injecting and storing the insulin appropriately. Video consults may assist with this.
- Ask owners to collect data for you at home for example:
  - Can they accurately weigh the pet?
  - Can they measure fluid intake?
  - Can they use urine dipsticks at home or drop a urine sample to the practice when they next are leaving the house for essential travel?
  - Can they do blood glucose testing at home?

If you have all this information, then you can confidently advise re insulin/diet adjustments without actually seeing the patient.

However, if the patient is not stable then further investigation will be warranted.

### Assessment of diabetic control

- **Fructosamine** can be difficult to interpret
  - If high this can mean the patient is not getting sufficient insulin.
  - If high this can also be indicative of a somogyi.
  - Take care when basing judgements solely on a fructosamine result as this can be very inaccurate and lead to inappropriate management.
- **Blood Glucose Curves**
  - Glucose curves give the most information.
  - Many owners will be able to perform these at home. There are various resources available to give them tips such as the International Cat Care YouTube video:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_j1zZ7\\_RVUU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_j1zZ7_RVUU)
  - EMLA cream (applied about 15minutes before testing) may be useful. Also using cotton wool dipped in warm water (then squeezed out), can be useful to hold under the ear, the warmth helps blood flow and the cotton wool means you won't prick your own finger when sampling from a thin ear.
  - Results can be emailed to the practice.
  - Ask for information on the patient's general health i.e. appetite, weight, drinking and urination.
  - If owners cannot perform glucose curves at home, then you will have to decide whether this should be done at the practice. Staffing levels may be reduced during COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines will have to be observed. As such this decision is more challenging than usual. VVS specialists are happy to talk cases through with you and assist with making these decisions.

N.B. If your patient does develop Diabetic KetoAcidosis (DKA) then please refer to the VVS Essential Clinical Guide to DKA or give our Internal Medicine Specialists a call.

### Consider Underlying Diseases / Conditions

- In entire female dogs, progesterone is a potent antagonist against insulin. Therefore, it will be very difficult to control the diabetes while the dog is having a season. Neutering a female dog before their next season should be considered. The dog should initially be treated with insulin and stabilised as much as possible before surgery.
- Urinalysis to try and rule out UTIs which can cause insulin resistance (ask the owner to drop a urine sample to the practice). Ideally, if there is evidence of infection then a cystocentesis should be performed and this sample sent off for culture and sensitivity. While waiting for the results, starting the patient on broad spectrum antibiotics such as potentiated amoxicillin should be considered. Repeat cystocentesis and culture should be performed 3-5 days after the antibiotic course has ended to ensure clearance of the infection.
- Full blood work to screen for concurrent disease.
- If a dog looks like it could have Cushing's disease then consider testing for this when restrictions are lifted but beware that there may be false positives due to the diabetes.
- In cats always consider acromegaly. This is particularly important in an uncontrolled cat who is gaining weight. The test of choice for this is IGF-1 and can be considered once restrictions are lifted.

### Specific Note re COVID-19

- This information sheet was published on 21/04/20. BVA and RCVS guidelines may be subject to regular change over the coming months. Please check for updates at:  
BVA: <https://www.bva.co.uk/>  
RCVS: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/home/>
- Diabetic cases may require intensive nursing care and this often requires more than one staff member to be working in close proximity.
- Ensure that social distancing guidelines are maintained and/or that appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is supplied to staff, to minimise transmission of COVID-19.
- If staffing levels or staff safety cannot be maintained to enable appropriate levels of care for the patient, then it may be necessary to consider alternative options.
- Animal welfare should be a priority, but so should human safety in these challenging and unprecedented times. Look after yourself and your team, as well as your patient.

If you would like to speak to a VVS Specialist about any of your cases, please do not hesitate to contact us:

**T: 020 7043 2283**

**E: [admin@vvs.vet](mailto:admin@vvs.vet)**

VVS Specialists are here to help and can review clinical history and test results and advise you on your cases as and when you need support.

**You may be working sole charge, but you are not alone.**