

Insulin Selection in Diabetic Dogs and Cats

Thomas Schermerhorn, VMD, DACVIM (SAIM), Kansas State University

ENDOCRINOLOGY & METABOLIC DISEASES | NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020 | PEER REVIEWED

[Print/View PDF](#)

HYPERGLYCEMIA DIAGNOSED

INVESTIGATION

Evaluate patient's history, perform a physical examination, and assess CBC, serum chemistry profile, and urinalysis results

Is persistent hyperglycemia present, along with compatible clinical and laboratory findings?

NO

YES

Diabetes mellitus (DM) not indicated

INVESTIGATION

Assess patient for other conditions that cause hyperglycemia:

- ▶ Laboratory error
- ▶ Physiologic hyperglycemia (ie, stress/fear)
- ▶ Hyperadrenocorticism*
- ▶ Pancreatitis*
- ▶ Acromegaly*
- ▶ Drug effect (eg, glucocorticoids)
- ▶ Sepsis
- ▶ Trauma
- ▶ Pregnancy/diestrus

TREATMENT

Pursue appropriate diagnosis and treatment depending on determined underlying cause

DIAGNOSIS

Diabetes mellitus (DM)

Insulin-independent

- ▶ Hyperglycemia may occur despite normal or elevated serum insulin concentration in patients with prediabetes or conditions that cause insulin resistance
- ▶ Hyperglycemia may be treated by means

- ▶ Hypoglycemia may be treated by means other than insulin (eg, diet, weight loss, oral hypoglycemic drugs)
- ▶ Uncommon in dogs and cats
- ▶ Most dogs and cats require insulin at the time of diagnosis

Insulin-dependent

- ▶ Insulin formulations can be grouped by expected duration of action:
 - Ultra-short-action: Insulin aspart, insulin lispro
 - Short-action: Regular insulin
 - Intermediate-action: Lente insulin, NPH insulin
 - Long-action: protamine zinc insulin, insulin glargine, insulin detemir
 - Ultra-long-action: Insulin glargine U300, insulin degludec
- ▶ Insulin products
 - For human use, these products are marketed under various trade names and are available as U100 (100 Units insulin/mL) preparations
 - Concentrated preparations (\geq U300) are available for specialized applications
 - Veterinary products are available as U40 preparations

Does patient appear ill and possibly require hospitalization?

YES

NO

Complicated DM

- ▶ Hyperglycemia
- ▶ Associated metabolic disturbances, such as:
 - Hyperosmolality
 - Ketosis
 - Acidosis
 - Electrolyte disturbances
- ▶ Diabetic ketoacidosis
- ▶ Hyperglycemia hyperosmolar syndrome
- ▶ DM with concurrent severe illness (eg, necrotizing pancreatitis)

TREATMENT

Early insulin therapy

- ▶ Goals:
 - Immediate insulin replacement to control hyperglycemia
 - Ability to rapidly manipulate glucose level
- ▶ Ultra-short-action or short-action insulin is indicated
 - Regular insulin CRI or IM can control hyperglycemia
 - Ultra-short-action insulin can be equally effective, but experience is limited in dogs and cats

TREATMENT

Transitional insulin therapy

- ▶ Begins when patient is stable, hydrated, and able to eat and drink
- ▶ Goals
 - Control glycemia using intermittent insulin administration
 - Insulin duration sufficient to suppress hyperglycemia over an extended time period

Does patient maintain normal appetite and water intake?

NO

YES

See ***Complicated DM*** (above)

Uncomplicated DM

- ▶ Hyperglycemia without major metabolic disturbances

TREATMENT

Initial insulin therapy

- ▶ Goals:
 - Educate pet owners regarding insulin use, including appropriate handling and administration techniques and potential for

- hypoglycemic complications
- Initiate intermittent insulin therapy
- Insulin duration sufficient to suppress hyperglycemia over an extended time period

INVESTIGATION

Insulin selection

- ▶ No insulin formulation or type is clearly indicated as the preferred choice in dogs or cats. However, expert guidelines provide a starting point for beginning insulin treatment in diabetic dogs and cats.¹
- ▶ Intermediate- and long-action insulin are most suitable for daily at-home administration
 - Twice-daily administration is typical, but once-daily administration is possible in some dogs receiving PZI and some cats receiving insulin glargine or insulin detemir
- ▶ Other considerations for at-home insulin selection include:
 - Cost
 - Product availability
 - Preferred source for supplies (ie, veterinary clinic vs commercial pharmacy)

TREATMENT

Chronic insulin therapy

Long-term insulin therapy is guided by information obtained through periodic monitoring

monitoring.

▶ Goals:

- Acceptable glycemic control and hypoglycemia avoidance
- Acceptable patient quality of life
- Treatment protocol balances patient needs and owner convenience

▶ Monitoring may include:

- Clinical assessment of DM signs, body weight, BCS, activity level, and general health
 - Periodic use of urine glucose and ketone monitoring is occasionally recommended. Large changes in urine glucose and/or the appearance of ketonuria may indicate deterioration of diabetes control in previously regulated dogs and cats. Absence of glucosuria can indicate hypoglycemia.
- Glycated protein assessment
 - Serum fructosamine and/or blood hemoglobin A1c levels provide information on blood glucose concentrations over preceding several weeks and months, respectively.
- Glycemic profile assessment
 - Can be assessed using standard 12- or 24-hour glucose curve(s) or continuous glucose monitoring (eg, interstitial glucose monitoring device) methods. These are the only routine methods that assess the pharmacodynamic profile of injected insulin in diabetic dogs and cats and are important to evaluate before making a change in insulin formulation (eg, intermediate- to long-action insulin) or type (eg, insulin glargine to insulin detemir).

- Indications for performing a glucose curve include:
 - Concern for hypoglycemia
 - Requiring information not available through other assessments (eg, glycated protein measurement)
 - Determining the time–action profile of insulin used
- Curve results can be markedly influenced by the circumstances under which the curve is performed. Steps taken to minimize stress and anxiety (eg, performing measurements at home rather than in the clinic) may improve the reliability of information provided by the curve.



INVESTIGATION

- ▶ DM signs persist or signs of hypoglycemia are noted?
- ▶ Laboratory assessments indicate persistent hyperglycemia or frequent/intermittent hypoglycemia?
- ▶ Patient quality of life not optimal?



NO



YES

No change needed



Dose change may be needed

Dose adjustment guidelines:

- ▶ Reduce insulin dose by 25%-50% if hypoglycemia associated with clinical signs (eg, lethargy, weakness, seizure, among others) is noted or if there is clear evidence for biochemical hypoglycemia
 - Discontinue insulin if there is evidence of persistent hypoglycemia
 - Some cats receiving long-term insulin may develop persistent, often subclinical hypoglycemia, which may indicate diabetes remission
- ▶ Dose increase is typically done in 10%-20% increments in dogs
- ▶ Minimal dose change in cats is usually 0.5 Unit because of difficulty in accurately providing smaller volumes
- ▶ Switching to twice-daily administration is an option when patients on once-daily insulin administration require a dose increase due to persistent hyperglycemia. Dividing the daily dose may reduce the risk for hypoglycemia following a dose increase

Insulin (ie, formulation, type) change

- ▶ Switch insulin based on:
 - Evidence for insufficient insulin duration
 - Substantial peak effect that produces hypoglycemia
 - Whether reduction in administration

frequency is desired

- ▶ New insulin should have characteristics or features that address the identified deficiencies

–For example, if NPH has abbreviated duration of action in a dog, PZI may be selected as the new insulin because of its generally longer duration of action



Re-evaluate 1-2 weeks after any adjustment to the insulin protocol

DM = diabetes mellitus, NPH = neutral protamine Hageman, PZI = protamine zinc insulin

REFERENCES

1. Behrend E, Holford A, Lathan P, Rucinsky R, Schulman R. 2018 AAHA diabetes management guidelines for dogs and cats. *J Am Anim Hosp Assoc.* 2018;54(1):1-21.

AUTHOR

Thomas Schermerhorn

VMD, DACVIM (SAIM)
Kansas State University

Thomas Schermerhorn, VMD, DACVIM (SAIM), is a professor of small animal medicine and the Morgan K “Al” Jarvis Chair of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University, where his laboratory focuses on cellular and molecular endocrinology, particularly the study of diabetes mellitus and related metabolic disorders in dogs and cats. Dr. Schermerhorn completed a medical internship at South Shore Veterinary Associates in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, and a residency in small animal internal medicine at Cornell University, where he also received research

training as a graduate fellow in the department of molecular medicine. His clinical interests include canine and feline endocrinology, particularly diabetes mellitus.

For global readers, a calculator to convert laboratory values, dosages, and other measurements to SI units [can be found here](#).

All *Clinician's Brief* content is reviewed for accuracy at the time of publication. Previously published content may not reflect recent developments in research and practice.

Material from *Clinician's Brief* may not be reproduced, distributed, or used in whole or in part without prior permission of Educational Concepts, LLC. [For questions or inquiries please contact us](#).