

How to do an Ear Prick on a Cat to Test Blood Glucose

Supplies

- Glucometer and Test Strips
- Lancet & Lancet Device (if used), or needles
- Vaseline (optional)
- WARM Damp Washcloth in a Ziploc plastic bag
- tissue or cotton ball (optional)



Step 1. Gather Supplies in an area with strong lighting.

We prefer to hold the lancet in our hand, and not use any sort of lancet device. This lets us see exactly where the point is going into the ear. Many like the spring-loaded lancet devices that allow you to set the depth of penetration.

Step 2. Warm the washcloth by running it under hot water.

Step 3. Sit comfortably with cat in your lap or next to you.

When first starting out, good lighting such as a desk lamp can help you to clearly see the vein at the outer edge of the ear. Having a sofa or chair arm available to lean your cat against can help to control wiggly maneuvers and calm your pet. As you learn where to prick, the strong light to see the vein isn't so important anymore. Some prefer to stand and use a counter area for testing. With a more difficult cat, both BG tests and insulin shots are easier to do while the cat is distracted by eating. Try different approaches, you'll soon find a routine that works for you and your cat.

Step 4. Apply the warm washcloth until the ear is really WARM, almost HOT!

The ear should be clean and dry. Check the temperature of the washcloth before applying it to the ear. It must be very warm, but not so hot that it would be uncomfortable or burn. Wrap a corner around the front side of the ear to warm both the front and back sides at once. If the ear still feels cool to your touch, it isn't warm enough to bleed easily. Don't try the prick until the ear is good and warm, it will just be frustrating for both you and your cat.

Another approach is to use a 75 watt bulb in a lamp positioned close to the ear to warm it—less intrusive than the washcloth. Some owners put regular uncooked rice in a sock and heat it in a microwave for the heat source.



Step 5. Look for the vein--orient the cat to the light so you can see it well.

You are aiming for the area between the vein and the outer edge of the ear, somewhere in the top half. You can see slight bruising where the cat in the picture has gotten pricked a lot recently. Most prick the back (fur) side of the ear, while others prick the front; both work.

Step 6. Apply a thin coat of Vaseline to area you will prick (optional).

Vaseline will help the blood drop to bead up instead of spreading into the fur. If you put a very small amount of Vaseline on the ear and rub it into the fur, that's enough. Don't use alcohol on the ear before or after the ear prick. It doesn't really sterilize the skin with the fur but it could dry the skin and make the ear prick sting.

Step 7. Insert test strip fully into the meter to turn it on.

Some meters must be off and some on before you insert the test strip – check the instructions for your meter. Be sure the strip is firmly seated in the meter--you can do it one-handed with practice. Some meters beep when they are ready for the drop of blood, and some show a picture or indicator on the screen when they are ready. Again, check your instructions. Make sure the code set on your meter is the same as the code on the strips. Check your manual for instructions on how to change the code for a new package of strips.



Step 8. Remove cover and position lancet between vein and outer edge.



Some people like to use a folded tissue, cotton ball or a roll of gauze or white tape as a backing (on front side of the ear) while pricking, and some like to use their finger. If you choose the latter, you can prick your finger by mistake, if you go all the way through the ear with the lancet – it's easy to do. The tissue or cotton ball can be folded around the edge of the ear while you apply pressure to stop bleeding and help prevent bruising. When testing more than once a day, try to alternate ears or at least move to a different spot on the ear each time.

Step 9. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly to relax yourself, then quickly and gently prick ear.

Step 10. Blood drop should well up. Slowly stroke ear, if needed.

Stroke the ear, wait a few seconds for the capillaries to refill, then stroke again. If you don't get a big enough drop before it starts to coagulate, you will need to prick again. The drop in the close-up is actually about 3 times what we needed for this meter, which requires a 3 microliter sample. The lancet you use does make a difference. Blood drops are smaller with Thin Lancets, but bigger with the Ultra Fine or Fine Point. If you are sure you are getting the ear warm enough, try a different lancet or different depth setting on your lancet device, if you are having trouble getting a big enough drop.



Step 11. Hold test strip to the base of blood drop and "sip" it.

Don't let go of the ear! Your cat will flick the blood drop all over everything, if you do. If it has already been close to 3 minutes, remove and re-insert the strip to restart the countdown. Most meters will shut off after 3 minutes, even in the middle of sipping up the blood drop. Try explaining to your cat that everything



was perfect except your timing ;). Your manual should tell you if your particular meter has an automatic shut-off feature and how long you have. Hold the tip of the test strip to the base of the blood drop. It only takes a second or two to "sip" up the blood drop. Some meters beep when "sipping" is detected. Don't remove the strip and meter right away unless the strip is already full. The meter then displays the seconds until the reading will appear. Some meters beep again when you have a sufficient

sample. You must look at the strip to tell if you have enough blood on the strip for a valid result.

Step 12. Put the meter down and apply pressure to ear for 15 sec.

Gentle pressure on the prick site for a few seconds will help prevent bruising. In the rare event that bleeding doesn't stop immediately, standard first aid techniques such as continued pressure, ice, or a styptic pencil will handle it.

Step 13. Reward cat. Praise, brush, cuddle or feed meal or treat.

Recognize that treats given with BG tests will elevate BGs, so don't be too generous with them when trying to do a curve to evaluate the effectiveness of your treatment. However, if you give the same treats at the same times everyday, they are part of the daily diet and should be included when doing curves for regulation.

Step 14. Record BG number, time, date, & notes about food/insulin.

Many meters store previous readings – refer to your manual for more information on this. Some have a data port which will allow you to download the readings in the meter memory to a computer, and use software to plot graphs of BG readings over time. To use the automatic download, you may have to purchase the special cable and maybe the software. There are advantages to recording each reading as you go, along with notes about any changes in feeding schedule, appetite, or insulin (everyone "misses" sometime). You can enter your readings into software manually, without buying the cable and doing the automatic memory download and still get the graphs.

Alternate lancet sites for blood glucose testing on cats are the inner surface of the ear and the foot pads.

