



## Service dog learns how to read blood sugar



Credit: KING

Maggie is about to become much more than a seeing-eye dog.

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by MEG COYLE / KING 5 News

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TACOMA, Wash. - Ginger Malcom first heard about Tacoma-based Dogabetics from a KING 5 story she saw in her hometown of Orlando. To call this a trip of a lifetime would be an understatement. Because for Ginger Malcom this trip could SAVE her life.

"I'm excited! I haven't slept. I think I've had four hours' sleep!" she said.

Diabetes has not only taken Ginger's sight, it's nearly taken her life. So she's here with her dog Maggie, who's about to become much more than a seeing-eye dog.

"I live alone and this is an opportunity to be safe at home and not worry about passing out and having neighbors or cab drivers find me on the floor," said Ginger.

The training and the testing start immediately. Trainer Ron Pace asks Ginger to check her blood sugar levels. He's teaching Maggie to respond.

"Get her attention and say, 'wanna do a check?' says Pace. Ginger pricks her finger. The monitor reads 118. The dog sniffs her blood to get her scent.

But for Maggie to really know what to sniff for, Ginger's levels need to come down. Her blood sugar is checked every 30 minutes. As her levels fall below 80, Ginger's personality changes. She loses her ability to reason, and she is no longer in a position to stop the freefall. That's where Maggie comes in.

The real work begins at the Canine Training Center under the watchful eye of Ron Pace. Pace says the key to success for Maggie and for Ginger is patience, persistence and repetition. A scent article from another diabetic gets things started. Pace directs a command at Maggie to "find the low." Maggie is more than a little motivated.

Ginger checks her levels again. It's down to 64. Pace puts Maggie to work. He instructs Ginger to put a piece of cheese in her mouth and blow in Maggie's face. Ginger's breath is what Maggie must detect before she gets the reward, the cheese.

"Getting her to locate the low on scent articles and then getting her to detect and alert through her body through her mouth and through her skin," says Pace. "Her motivation level is high, very high. So I think she'll be great."

Maggie is making history. At the end of her week-long training she'll become the first known certified dual-service dog in the country. But most importantly, Maggie and Ginger become bonded for life.

"I trust her whole-heartedly as a guide dog and I know I'll be able to trust her as an alert dog. I'm glad to have her. I wouldn't want it to be anybody else," said Ginger.

Pace donated his services and the mother of the boy and his diabetes service dog featured in our previous story donated her miles to fly Ginger out here. Ginger was able to raise money from family and friends to donate to Ron Pace's Dogabetics program.

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