



## Diet & Weight Control

Obesity is one of the most common medical conditions affecting dogs and cats in the U.S., according to recent studies indicating that 30 to 40 percent of U.S. pets are overweight and 25 percent of pets in the U.S. are obese. Similar to people, too much weight causes health issues in pets such as respiratory problems, diabetes, arthritis and heart disease. Overweight pets also have a greater chance of tearing ligaments and wearing down their joints, both of which make getting around painful.

Pets weigh much less than people, so an extra pound or two makes a big difference. It is important to keep an eye on your pet's diet, exercise routine and weight throughout his or her life. Average-sized cats should weigh between eight and 10 pounds, while a dog's ideal weight varies with his breed and size. A small dog may weigh about the same as a cat, while large-breed dogs may weigh sixty pounds or more. Your veterinarian can tell you what your dog's ideal weight should be based on his size and breed.

### How do I determine if my pet is overweight?

Your veterinarian can tell you if your pet is overweight during your pet's regular wellness exam. Your veterinarian may take a sample of your pet's blood for laboratory tests to determine if there is a medical reason for your pet's increased weight. If your pet is older, his weight gain may be attributed to lower activity and metabolism levels. Another cause of weight gain is giving your pet too many treats.

At home, you can monitor your pet's weight by feeling her ribs. Place your fingers on the side of her rib cage and press or rub gently. If you can easily feel your pet's ribs, she is probably not overweight, but if you have to press against her sides to feel her ribs, she may be overweight. You should also be able to easily spot your pet's "waist," that is, her body should become more slender as you look from the end of the ribs to the hindquarters.

### What should I feed my pet?

The same weight loss methods that work in humans also apply to pets. Controlling your pet's caloric intake and making sure he gets the right amount of exercise is the best way to help keep your pet at a healthy weight. Your veterinarian can help you develop a diet and exercise plan to keep your pet fit and trim.

If your pet needs to lose weight, he should do so gradually — a one to two percent loss per week is best. You can control his caloric intake in a few ways:

- 1) Give him less food
- 2) Give him dry food rather than canned food (dry food usually has fewer calories)
- 3) Your veterinarian may prescribe a special diet designed specifically for weight loss
- 4) For dogs, the best diet is low in fat and high in fiber.

Puppies (dogs that are less than one-year old) need a diet with extra protein, calcium and iron that is specially formulated for their developing bodies. Cats need a diet that is higher in protein.

### "Treat" your pet right

If your dog gets too many treats because you just can't resist his charm, try feeding him low-calorie treats. Your dog may enjoy fruits and raw vegetables such as apples, oranges, carrots, broccoli, potatoes and green beans. If he has trouble digesting raw vegetables and fruit or if the weather is hot, you can also give him an ice cube for a calorie-free treat!

Dog and cat treats are widely available at pet food and grocery stores. It is important to consider your pet's entire daily caloric intake, no matter what type of treat you give him. Therefore, you should not add treats to his daily food allotment, but rather substitute treats for a small portion of your pet's food. An easy way to do this is to take a few pieces of dry food from one of your pet's meals and give them as treats.

Never give your pet table scraps. People food usually contains fat, salt and other ingredients that your pet does not need and will cause him to gain weight. People food may even cause indigestion or diarrhea in your pet. Make sure to keep all people food in a place where your pet can't reach, such as your refrigerator or a covered trash can.

Most pets get the appropriate amount of fat, protein and other nutrients from their pet food, so treats should be only occasional indulgences. You should not make it a habit to vary from your pet's regular diet of pet food. Talk to your veterinarian about the best diet and treat plan to meet your pet's unique needs.

Your pet's diet is just half the battle. Regular exercise is also important to help keep your pet in shape.

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# Proper Feeding