

## Weight Management in Pets: The Obesity Epidemic

A scary thing is happening at the veterinary clinic these days. Similar to their human counterparts, an ever-expanding segment of the pet population appears to be having tremendous difficulty reigning in an ever-expanding waistline. To put it bluntly, many of our pets are F. A. T. - fat!

Excessive weight gain in pets exposes them to the same health risks as humans:

1. Diabetes
2. Joint and Back Problems
3. Heart Disease
4. Breathing Problems

But, health issues are so boring to talk about and, besides, YOUR portly pet won't ever have any of those issues, right? Now that you're thinking about the potential consequences of excessive weight gain, you're probably wondering IF your pet is overweight. Well, here's how you tell. In the veterinary clinic, we use a handy technique called Body Condition Scoring. If you're not familiar with Body Condition Scoring, it's best to have your veterinarian show you how to perform the following examination:

1. In a normal dog or cat we should be able to EASILY feel the rib cage when we GENTLY run our hands along the sides of the chest with the dog standing straight. If you have to press to feel the ribs, your pet has too much padding. If you can see your pet's ribs or they feel very prominent/bony, your pet is too thin. The same is true for the tips of the pelvis.
2. Your pet should have a well-defined waist-line (i.e. "hour-glass" figure) when viewed from above.
3. And, last but not least, check the "pinch an inch" area in the lower belly between the legs. It's true, no more than an inch should be pinched. If you can "grabba handful" instead, well, that's too much!

OK, so you've admitted to yourself that Fido or Fluffy could stand to lose a few. What now? I'm going to share with you the secret to weight loss. Are you ready?

\*Calories In must be LESS than Calories out\*

It's so simple, but we make it so difficult. If you eat fewer calories during the day than you expend during work and play, you WILL lose weight, period. So, how do we develop a diet plan? Below you will find some sample recommendations. Again, it is always best to discuss a weight loss plan with your pet's veterinarian.

### Weight Loss Plan

1. Switch to the light or low calorie version of the food you are feeding or see your veterinarian for prescription diet food designed to remove weight safely and effectively.
2. Determine what amount you should be feeding by looking on the package and feeding your pet the amount listed for a doggie or kitty that weighs at least 20% less than what your pet currently weighs. Your veterinarian may recommend cutting back even further depending on your pet's particular condition.
3. You should feed twice daily (AM and PM). This helps encourage normal metabolism. Many sumo wrestlers only eat once daily as this encourages fat retention.
4. Use an actual measuring cup to measure out the exact amount of food you should be feeding. Use very small measures for cats as even tiny "extra" amounts end up as fat deposits.

5. Make certain all family members are on the same page as far as feeding amounts and schedule. Watch toddlers/children to make sure they're not sneaking Fluffy people food and to make sure Rex hasn't become a K9 vacuum cleaner.
6. Buster cubes, feline food balls, treat puzzles that can be used for regular food can be found at Pet Smart and can slow eating while encouraging exercise. The Eat Better Bowl can also help.
7. Speaking of exercise, regular moderate exercise will help immensely (calories out!). Playing ball, running off leash (in an enclosed area), swimming or jogging are all great. For cats, have regular daily, vigorous play sessions.
8. Most veterinarians welcome their clients to stop by at anytime to use their scale in order to assess progress.

What about treats?

Keep in mind that just 2-3 small dog biscuits can equal up to a half cup of food. Safer treats to use include raw veggies/carrots, ice cubes, or plain unbuttered air popped popcorn. You can also keep out part of your pet's measured daily portion of kibble (1/4 to 1/2 cup) and feed those as treats during the day.

Remember, pets that are normal body weight live an average of 1-2 years longer than those who are even slightly overweight. So, get out there - today - and go for a walk. You'll both feel, and look, better!

A great website with lots of informational tools is [www.petfit.com](http://www.petfit.com). And, as always, [www.safeharborvet.com](http://www.safeharborvet.com)