





















Help Your Pet Lose Weight to Help Them Live Longer

When you look at your pet, do they have a waistline? When you run your hands over their sides can you find their ribs without having to search very hard? Obesity is the leading nutritional disorder among dogs and cats. Studies suggest that over 50% of America's pet population is overweight or obese. Another way to determine whether or not your pet is overweight is by looking at a body condition chart (see below courtesy of The Iams Company).

Body Condition Description Chart

| | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|--|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, and pelvic bones easily visible■ No palpable fat■ Obvious waist and abdominal tuck■ Prominent pelvic bones | Thin |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible■ Thin neck and narrow waist■ Obvious abdominal tuck■ No fat in flank folds, folds often absent |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs easily palpable■ Minimal fat covering■ Waist easily noted when viewed from above■ Abdominal tuck evident | Underweight |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Backbone and ribs easily palpable■ Minimal fat covering■ Minimal waist when viewed from above■ Slightly tucked abdomen |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs palpable, but not visible■ Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above■ Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side | Ideal |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs palpable, but not visible■ Slight waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above■ Abdomen tucked up, flank folds present |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs palpable with slight excess of fat covering■ Waist discernible when viewed from above, but not prominent■ Abdominal tuck apparent | Overweight |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Slight increase in fat over ribs, but still easily palpable■ Abdomen slightly rounded, flanks concave■ Flank folds hang down with moderate amount of fat—jiggle noted when walking |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs not easily palpable under a heavy fat covering■ Fat deposits over lumbar area and tail base■ Waist barely visible to absent■ No abdominal tuck -- may exhibit obvious abdominal distention | Obese |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ribs and backbone not easily palpable under a heavy fat covering■ Abdomen rounded, waist barely visible to absent■ Prominent flank folds which sway from side to side when walking |

Excess weight adversely affects your pet's health, energy levels, and quality of life. Being overweight can reduce your pet's lifespan, impair heart and breathing functions, make your pet more likely to be stressed by heat, cause excess stress on bones and joints, and possibly lead to diabetes (especially in cats). Overfeeding (feeding your pet more calories than they can expend and/or giving them table scraps), lack of exercise, age (older pets are more likely to be overweight), gender (female pets are more prone to weight gain), genetic predisposition (certain breeds such as Labrador Retrievers, beagles, basset hounds, and dachshunds seem particularly susceptible to obesity), and endocrine imbalances can all be factors

leading your pet to be overweight. If you believe your pet is overweight, an examination by a veterinarian is suggested. Any predisposing abnormalities can be diagnosed by your veterinarian and they can help recommend the right weight reduction program for your pet.

How to Start

If your pet receives a lot of treats and table scraps, an easy way to start is to eliminate table scraps and limit their treats to one or two low-calorie treats per day. Consider substituting affection for treats. Another idea is the green bean diet-for dogs. This involves cutting back your dog's food and replacing part of it with canned green beans instead. You want to do this process slowly so that your dog has time to become accustomed to the change in their food. You should begin by decreasing the amount of food they receive by about 10% and replacing the amount of food with an equal amount of

canned green beans. Every 3-5 days take out another 10% of their food and replace with canned green beans until they are receiving half the amount of food they were receiving. For instance, a dog that normally received 2 cups twice a day would receive 1 cup of food + 1 cup of canned green beans twice a day after they were completely switched over. The green beans help your dog to feel full, while not eating as many calories. Leave your dog on this plan until they reach their desired weight, at which point you can slowly begin cutting out the green beans and returning them to a maintenance level of food. Before you begin this plan (and with all diet plans) you should consult a veterinarian first.

Another option, is to change your pet's food to a formula specially designed for overweight or less active pets. You should make sure you switch your pet's food over gradually to make sure you don't upset their digestive system. If you feed one large meal a day, or have food always available, consider dividing the daily ration into several small meals (at least two meals a day) and remove whatever food is not eaten after 30 minutes.

Exercise Your Pet

Exercise is just as important (if not more) than diet. Unfortunately, many pets and people do not get enough activity. To get your pet in shape, begin a moderate exercise program with the input of your veterinarian. Walking and games are beneficial for both you and your pet...calories are burned and the bond between the two of you is strengthened. In the beginning, your overweight pet will probably tire easily. They will have little tolerance of heat and humidity, watch for shortness of breath or other signs of fatigue and stop before your pet experiences any problems. Cats are much harder to put on an exercise program. However, it is possible to encourage them to exercise through play and some cats can be taught to walk on a leash.

All pets should get at least half an hour, four times per week, of moderate exercise. Daily exercise is the best way to keep your pet happy, healthy, and well behaved. However, even 10 minutes a day of regular exercise will help your pet to stay in shape. If you don't have the time to exercise your pet, consider hiring a reputable pet-walking company and/or a neighbor to come by and take your pet for a walk or play games with it. Taking your dog to an obedience class is another good option that will help them stay in shape, socialize with other people and dogs, and become a more well-mannered family pet.

Helping your pet lose weight is one of the best things you can do for them. An overweight pet (even if not obese) will generally live a shorter and less active life. By controlling their weight you are giving them the best chance possible to live a happy, healthy life!

Once your pet has been overweight, they will be more prone to experiencing weight gain again. This means that you will have to set-up an ongoing maintenance plan which includes controlled food intake of a high quality diet, regular exercise, and regular check-ups that include weigh-ins.

Remember, if you ever have any problems or questions, make sure you contact your veterinarian.