



PET INDUSTRY MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

Obesity in pets



Article by Kirk Dunn
of Michigan Veterinary Clinics

Obesity is not only the biggest health crisis facing human Americans, our pets are in the same predicament. Nationwide, it is estimated that 45 percent of all dogs and 58 percent of all cats are either overweight or obese. How do you know if your pet is overweight? Look at him/her from the top. Your pet should have a trim chest. You should be able to feel the ribs with your hands (without poking through two inches of fat) but not visually count them. As you follow the body contour, there should actually be a narrowing at the waist. Sadly, many dogs look like pork sausages with no waist, and most cats actually bulge at the waist like a butterball turkey.

When an owner is informed that a pet is overweight, the first comment is usually, "But Doc, he/she only eats _____." No matter what the amount, if a person or pet is fat, they eat too much!

Pet owners often don't realize how overweight their pet is. If a cat weighs 14 pounds but should weigh 9 pounds, he/she is 5 pounds overweight. That may not seem like much until you think percentages. That 5 pounds is 56 percent extra weight. It would be the same as a 200-pound man weighing 320 pounds. Sadly, public perception is that a fat dog is the right size. The first step is acknowledging that your pet is overweight.

Obesity is never good for anyone. In cats, the biggest problems resulting from being overweight are diabetes and liver failure due to fat being deposited in the liver. Untreated, both will be fatal. Another problem in fat cats is skin fold inflammation

and infection from the deep folds created due to all the fat. They can also have mats and terrible fur coats because they can no longer bend their back to reach places for grooming themselves. Remember, if your cat looks like Garfield he/she is not cute, he/she is fatter than the participants on The Biggest Loser reality show. A 20-pound cat is equal to a 500-pound man.

In dogs, the biggest consequences from obesity are tremendous joint problems. The more weight you carry around the harder it is on your joints. How much do you think your older dog is suffering when it weighs 10-60 percent more than it should? Without fail, owners who trim their pets down report they are much happier and more active after losing the weight.

The good part about pets and weight control is that they don't physically control the food dish. They can't buy the food at the store, and they can't fill their dish, so weight loss should be easy, right? Wrong.

The problem is obese pets are master manipulators of their owners. Whether they verbally harass you (barking, howling, meowing), physically harass you by being your toes, or mentally harass you with "the look," they are sadly in control of you and the situation.

The first thing to know is that your pet isn't going to starve to death if fed less. Never feed what the manufacturer recommends, it is always too much (half to two-thirds of the amount is usually good). Start by cutting your pet's food portions in half. Weigh the pet every two weeks and record the progress. If he/she is not losing weight, cut the food back more.

Prescription diets such as Hills R/D provide 40 percent of the calories of regular food. Prescription medications such as Stentrel suppress appetite. These are helpful but not necessary if you can use self-discipline. For treats, use raw green vegetables. There are almost no calories in green vegetables if you don't sauce them up. If your pet likes the vegetables, it is great. If the pet refuses them, either he/she isn't that hungry or is just holding out for the fattening stuff. Be strong. You can do it, and your pet will benefit greatly. 🐾



Contrary to popular belief, dogs aren't color blind; they can see shades of blue, yellow, green and gray. The color red registers on a grayscale in a dog's vision.

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PET EXTRAVAGANZA - Obesity in Pets

Author: Kirk Dixon of Hilton Head Veterinary Clinics

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