

Weight and Your Pet

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Obesity is one of the leading causes of sickness in the United States, not just for humans but for our pets as well. It is estimated that 50% of the dogs and cats in the United States are overweight or obese. The health risks for obese pets are much the same as for humans: diabetes, hypertension, osteoarthritis, respiratory disorders, heart disease and many forms of cancer.

So how do you know if your pet is overweight? Here are some simple guidelines. If your pet is a healthy weight you should easily be able to feel his ribs, he should not have a sagging stomach and you should see a waist when viewed from above. Your pet is overweight if it is difficult to feel the ribs under fat or he has a sagging stomach. He may also have a broad, flat back and no waist when seen from above.

Your veterinarian can examine your pet and rule out any medical problems that may be contributing to obesity. He or she will determine an ideal body weight and calculate daily calorie requirements necessary for the pet to lose weight. This may mean a reduced calorie diet, reduction in food amount, or both.

Exercise is an important part of weight loss. In dogs, this means going on brisk walks that gradually increase in length as the pet loses weight. Chasing balls or sticks and swimming are also great forms of exercise. Cats require a bit more creative forms of exercise. Use feather toys, flashlights, paper bags or balls, anything that your cat finds interesting to chase. Try to engage your cat for ten minutes twice a day. You can do this while you eat, watch television or even read. There are numerous toys that move and squeak that may also be interesting to your cat.

Multi pet households with an obese pet should feed the pets separately if possible. This eliminates food sharing or stealing. Food should not be left out all the time, and the food bowl can be moved on a regular basis to encourage the pet to move to get his food.

Rechecks and weigh-ins are important to monitor progress. A healthy weight loss should be around one pound per month for cats and one to five pounds per month for dogs, based on their size and the amount they have to lose. Most pets will achieve their weight loss goals in six to eight months.

Weight loss is tough for anyone: two- or four-legged! However, losing weight and getting in shape can add not only years to you or your pet's life; it can also make those extra years more enjoyable. Shedding a few pounds off of your cuddly canine or feline may be easier than you think. It simply requires understanding the need for weight loss and fitness, attention to details and simple assistance from your veterinary healthcare team.