

## OBESITY—What's the Big Deal?

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Obesity is the most common disease seen in pet dogs and cats, with estimates anywhere from 25-50% of the pet population being overweight.

So what's the problem. Well, just like in people, obesity can lead to other diseases and a shortened life span. In fact, a recent study showed that obese dogs live an average of **two years less** than healthy-weighted dogs. Middle-aged obese cats have a **3-fold increase in mortality** over optimally-weighted cats.

Why are so many pets overweight?

They are victims of today's society. Most pets are indoors these days. This is, of course, a good thing, but lends itself to a sedentary lifestyle. Wild animals have to work for their food. I haven't seen too many dogs and cats who have to chase their food bowl! We are guilty of indulging our pets with treats, and pets are good at manipulating us, begging for food when they really don't need it. Sometimes, especially in a long-coated animal, it is difficult for an owner to see just how big a pet is getting. Rarely in dogs, certain disease may play a role in obesity. We may want to test for thyroid disease or Cushing's syndrome if a diet isn't working.

What can we do. There really is no substitute for a good old-fashioned diet and exercise program. As with so many things, dogs and cats do no go by the same manual on this one.

### **Obesity is linked to:**

*Diabetes  
High blood pressure  
Pancreatitis  
Fatty liver syndrome  
Respiratory disease  
Heart disease  
Arthritis  
Surgical complications  
Shortened life span  
Certain cancers*

**Dogs** are omnivores, meaning they are designed to eat both plants and animals. They are also "bulk eaters" meaning they eat until their stomachs are physically full. Because of this, the best diet strategy is usually a high-fiber and low-calorie food. The fiber serves to make the dog feel full and satisfied. So, following these steps should result in appropriate weight loss:

1. Switch to a weight-loss food that is high in fiber.
2. Get a suggestion from us for an appropriate amount to feed. Another suggestion is to measure what your pet is eating now, and decrease that by about 25%.
3. Take treats, snacks, and table scraps into consideration. **Switch to lean snacks like baby carrots, apple slices, and plain green beans.** Break treats into quarters instead of feeding the whole thing.
4. Get the whole family involved. Its surprising how many times grandma is guilty of sneaking food.
5. Get Sparky moving! Start slowly and build up. Take a walk, chase a Frisbee, go swimming. If arthritis is slowing the pet down, talk to a veterinarian about nutritional supplements or anti-inflammatories that might help get Sparky moving and losing weight.

**OVER**

**For cats**, the strategies are somewhat different. Cats are carnivores. They are designed to eat meat. Therefore, their intestinal tracts are designed to handle high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets. Unfortunately for our little hunter friends, the manufacturing process for dry foods requires quite a bit more carbohydrate than they need. This has led to insulin resistance and obesity in our pet felines. This has made overweight pet cats prone to diabetes, fatty liver, and other diseases.

Weight loss in cats can be achieved in several ways. Like dogs, some cats can achieve weight-loss on a high-fiber diet. A somewhat more effective method is to feed a high-protein diet. Many canned products are higher in protein than dry. Canned food has many other health benefits as well.

**The most important part of the weight loss program is FOLLOW UP!**

**Stop by and put your pet on the scale in a few weeks and see how you're doing! It's a free and fun visit for your pet and you'll get important feedback.**

**If you aren't making progress, one of our doctors will be happy to revise your plan.**

Regardless of brand or type of food, simply changing from ad lib (free choice) to feeding a set amount is key. Many indoor pets are allowed access to a bowl of food and that bowl is always full. Naturally, cats are going to eat more than they need. A simple strategy is to measure what they eat on a typical day (get an average over several days) then cut back by 25%, and feed meals instead of free choice. Cats also benefit from exercise. A ten minute play session per day is usually effective.

Some pets require prescription food to start out. These foods are designed so that you can cut back on calories without sacrificing vitamins or minerals. We will let you know if a prescription food is right for your pet.

Your Pet's Diet Plan:

Your pet currently weighs \_\_\_\_\_ lbs.  
(S)he should weigh ~ \_\_\_\_\_ lbs.

You are feeding \_\_\_\_\_ cups/cans per day currently.  
Start by feeding \_\_\_\_\_ per day.

Reweigh in \_\_\_\_\_ weeks (its free!)

Recommended food:

GOOD LUCK!