

FAT FIGHT

Like Us, Pets Must Eat Right and Keep Moving



by Dr. Shawn Messonnier

Obesity, a severe and debilitating illness, is the most common nutritional disease in both animals and people. The latest survey of 121 veterinarians in 36 states by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) and corroborating American Veterinarian Medical Association data reveal we have 80 million fat cats and obese dogs; that's more than 58 percent of dogs and 52 percent of domesticated cats. "Pet obesity remains the leading health threat to our nation's pets," says Dr. Ernie Ward, APOP's founder, from the organization's headquarters in Calabash, North Carolina.

Current medical consensus states that an animal is obese if it weighs at least 15 percent more than its ideal weight. But looking at body composition is more accurate, based on measurements top-to-bottom and side-to-side and depth to the ribs and spine.

Health Issues

Animals aren't born fat. Obesity results from too many calories in food, snacks and treats, paired with a lack of aerobic exercise. People may believe they are showing love by rewarding begging with treats, but they actually may be slowly killing their companions with kindness, putting them on a path toward painful and costly medical problems.

These can include cancer, cardiac problems, complications from drug therapy, difficulty breathing, heat intolerance, hypertension, intervertebral disk disease, orthopedic conditions (including arthritis), lethargy and ruptured ligaments. Also, because excess body fat first deposits in the cavities of the chest and abdomen and under the skin, hypothyroidism and diabetes mellitus can develop, so screen overweight animals for these disorders prior to treatment for obesity.

Tackling obesity involves restricting calories and increasing the metabolic rate with a controlled exercise program. Diet and exercise are the two most vital factors in fighting fat.

Eating Right

Simply switching to a store-bought "lite" pet food is inadequate because many are designed to maintain, not lose, weight. Also, many products contain chemicals, byproducts and unhealthy fillers that are contrary to a holistic program.

A homemade restricted-calorie diet is the best choice for obese animals. The second is a processed "obesity-management" diet available through veterinarians, although many of these also contain chemicals, byproducts and fillers. Such diets can be used to attain the target weight, and then replaced with a homemade maintenance diet.

Foods high in fiber work well for shedding pounds because they increase metabolism. Vegetable fiber decreases fat and glucose absorption. Fluctuating glucose levels cause greater insulin release that can lead to diabetes; because insulin is needed for fat storage, low, stable levels are preferred. Fiber also binds to fat in the intestinal tract and increases the movement of digested food through the intestines.

Supplement Options

Several natural therapies may be helpful for treating animal obesity. These include herbs such as cayenne, ginger and mustard; white bean extract; chromium; carnitine; hydroxycitric acid (HCA); epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG); and coenzyme Q10. All have been widely used with variable success, although not yet thoroughly researched or clinically proven.

A supplement called Vetri-Lean appears promising. Based on a white bean extract, it has cut starch digestion by up to 75 percent in the company's clinical tests. The formula also has EGCG from green tea extract to boost metabolism, inhibit carbohydrate-digesting enzymes and help maintain normal blood insulin levels, all to help dissolve fat and control appetite. Chromium polynicotinate, another ingredient, also helps to curb appetite, build muscles and reduce fat.

Exercise is Key

As with humans, a regular program of supervised exercise is essential to pet health. Experience shows that it must be combined with a diet and supplement plan to achieve maximum results for overweight pets. Along with burning off excess calories, even mild exercise works to reduce hunger, improve muscle strength and aerobic capacity and improve functioning of organs. Plus, as veterinarians further attest, the activity is mentally stimulating for both animals and guardians, while decreasing behavioral problems.

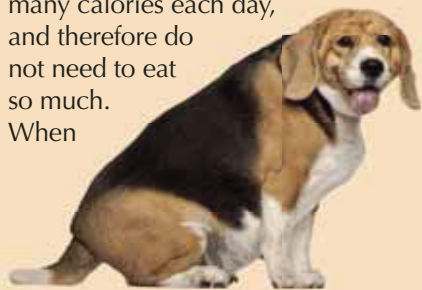
There is no one best exercise program for every animal; a sensible plan must be personalized to needs and abilities. Consult a veterinarian to determine the best regimen. As always, prevention is better than a cure, so staying alert to signs of additional pounds and keeping an animal from becoming obese in the first place is optimum.

Dr. Shawn Messonnier has authored The Arthritis Solution for Dogs, 8 Weeks to a Healthy Dog, and the award-winning Natural Health Bible for Dogs & Cats. His Paws & Claws Animal Hospital is located in Plano, TX. Find helpful tips at PetCareNaturally.com.

Pet Obesity: A Serious Problem with a Simple Solution

by Lori D. Leonard, DVM, VetMFHom

Obesity and overweight in pets refers to extra fat in their bodies. Extra fat puts a strain on a pet's heart, bones and joints, and immune system. There are only a few diseases that can cause a dog or cat to gain weight, so if a pet is overweight, it usually is a reflection of an imbalance between calories eaten versus calories burned in a 24-hour period. Let's face it—cats sleep 20 hours a day. Not many calories are burned with that schedule! Many dogs similarly do not burn very many calories each day, and therefore do not need to eat so much. When



they look at you with “those eyes,” give them a pet or a cuddle, which are both calorie-free.

How do you know if a pet is overweight? The easiest way is to feel over the ribs for mild, moderate or excess padding. Also, look at the belly and determine if there is too much “plumpness.” Purina's Body Condition System is a useful guide for this process (see ProjectPetSlimdown.com).

What do you do if your pet is overweight or obese? First, check with your veterinarian to be sure that there is no health problem that requires medical intervention or that precludes exercise. Then encourage regular, moderate, daily exercise. Check food labels and feed good-quality adult dog or cat food. Expensive “weight loss” foods often rob your pet of needed nutrients. Avoid corn, wheat and soy ingredients

in food. Measure (with a measuring cup) the total number of ounces fed per day to each animal. Be sure that everyone feeding the animals understands the feeding protocol. Free access to clean water is important for hydration and kidney health. Treats can be given in moderation, but be aware that some treats are healthy while others are calorie-laden or contain undesirable ingredients. Fresh, raw veggies (except onions) are always a good choice as a treat.

If your pet needs to lose a little weight, the safest method is to reduce the daily amount of food. Weigh your pet weekly and record the progress. Consistent, slow weight loss is best, as rapid weight loss can lead to serious health problems.

A pet who enjoys an optimum weight has the best chance for a healthy life and less risk of contracting disease or chronic problems. We want our pets to live as long as possible, don't we?

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