

Obesity in Dogs

I have been told that my dog is obese and must be put on a diet. Is this true?

In people, over two-thirds of all Americans and Canadians are overweight and over one-third (33%) of all adults are obese. Unfortunately, this same number now applies to our pets. Obesity leads to several diseases, both in pets and people. Type II diabetes, heart disease and arthritis are the most common weight-related disorders.

Diet and weight reduction are key things you can control to help your pet live as long and healthy a life as possible.

What is obesity?

Obesity is generally defined as weighing 30% more than the ideal weight for a given pet. With humans, the ideal weight can usually be determined by consulting weight and height charts. Since there are so many different breeds and body conformations in dogs, the ideal weight is determined by using a combination of weight charts and body scoring.

A simplified form of body scoring follows:

VERY THIN

RIBS - Easily felt with no fat covering

TAIL BASE - Bones protrude with no tissue between the skin and bone

SIDE VIEW - Severe abdominal tuck or "drawn" appearance

OVERHEAD VIEW - Exaggerated hourglass shape

UNDERWEIGHT

RIBS - Easily felt with no fat covering

TAIL BASE - Bones are raised with little tissue between the skin and bone

SIDE VIEW - Abdominal tuck

OVERHEAD VIEW - Significant hourglass shape

IDEAL



RIBS - Easily felt with slight (<1/2") fat cover

TAIL BASE - Smooth but bones can be felt under a thin layer of fat

SIDE VIEW - Abdominal tuck

OVERHEAD VIEW - Well-proportioned waist is present

OVERWEIGHT

RIBS - Difficult to feel with moderate (>1/2") fat cover

TAIL BASE - Some thickening, but bones can be felt under a moderate layer of fat

SIDE VIEW - No abdominal tuck or waist

OVERHEAD VIEW - Back is slightly broadened

OBESE

RIBS - Difficult to feel under thick fat cover

TAIL BASE - Thickened and difficult to feel under a thick layer of fat

SIDE VIEW - Fat hangs down from the abdomen and there is no waist

OVERHEAD VIEW - Markedly wide

If my dog is overweight, will his behavior change?

Most overweight or obese dogs are less active and do not play as much as normal dogs. These pets may be reluctant to climb stairs or jump into cars and often pant excessively after very minor exertion.

What is the cause of obesity?

Obesity is the accumulation of excess energy stored as fat. It occurs when your pet receives more calories than he needs and expends. *Hypothyroidism* may predispose dogs to obesity. Any overweight dog should be tested for hypothyroidism before beginning a weight loss program.

I had my dog neutered. Do you think this caused the problem?

It is very unlikely that neutering caused your pet's weight problem.

My dog can't be obese because he only eats a small amount of food every day.

Obesity often develops insidiously. We think we are feeding our dogs only small quantities of food, but tend to forget the treats and table foods. These treats add calories and result in weight gain. A few extra calories a day can add up over time.

What can I do?

"With today's advances in nutrition, weight loss has never been easier."



With today's advances in nutrition, weight loss has never been easier. Your veterinarian will design a safe and effective weight loss program to meet your dog's lifestyle.

To help your pet burn more calories, take him on a brisk, thirty-minute walk twice daily. Discontinue feeding table foods and treats. Instead, offer carrots, broccoli or veterinary-approved low-calorie treats.

"The great news is that weight reduction is about 60% diet and 40% exercise."

Most pets can lose weight if you adhere to these recommendations. Weight loss in pets and humans requires both reduced caloric intake (eating less) and increased caloric expenditure (more physical activity). The great news is that weight reduction is about 60% diet and 40% exercise. Weight loss is often a matter of diligence and persistence. Remember that the reason you are doing this is to help your pet live as long and healthy a life as possible. Who knows, you both may benefit from this diet!

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM
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