



## Obesity and Weight Loss

Pet obesity is our pets' number one health threat. Today's dogs and cats are living longer than ever before. Unfortunately, they're also more likely to have obesity and costly weight-related diseases. When it comes to preventing disease and helping your pet live a long, healthy, pain-free life, there may be nothing more important than maintaining a healthy weight.

Obesity and excess weight in dogs and cats is one of the most commonly diagnosed medical disorders in veterinary practice. ***In the United States, an estimated 56% of dogs and 60% of cats are classified as overweight or obese***, in the United Kingdom 46% of dogs, 34% of cats and 30% rabbits, and global estimates of overweight or obese pets range from 22% to 44%.



If you're looking for the Fountain of Youth for your pets, it may be found in their food bowl.

### Did you Know.....?

- On average, pets who are overweight live up to 2 years LESS than those who are at an ideal body weight.
- Overweight animals are more likely to develop Osteoarthritis (joint arthritis), Diabetes, Cruciate ligament injury, Kidney Disease, Skin Disorders, Respiratory and Cardiac disease, High Blood Pressure, Chronic Inflammation, and even Cancer. They are also likely to have higher risks with anesthesia and have a reduced immune function.
- Overweight animals can show signs of pain and arthritis TWICE as early as those who are at an ideal body condition and weight loss alone can result in an up to 80% improvement in pain and lameness scores for arthritic pets. One study showed that a group of overweight dogs developed signs of pain and arthritis at 6 years of age, while the group who was not overweight didn't develop these signs until 12 years of age! WHOA!

Whether you are an animal or a person, weight loss can be challenging. It requires discipline and let's face it, it's less fun to count calories than it is to be able to snack freely.

In some cases, there is a **medical condition** to blame for excessive weight so you always want to work with your veterinarian to make sure any medical illness has been ruled out and that a diet plan is appropriate for your pet.

If a medical condition doesn't seem to be to blame, then when it comes to weight loss, it's all about **calories, exercise, and accountability**.

## CALORIES

Calories come from your pet's **food, treats, dental chews and snacks, rawhides, table scraps, medication administration treats, fish oil, and vitamins and supplements**. ALL of these things count as part of your pet's daily calorie intake.

Calories in pet food are listed as **KCAL PER CUP, KCAL PER CAN, OR KCAL PER # OF TREATS** and these values should be easily found on the product package or website. If you can't easily find these amounts, then you should reconsider feeding that particular product to your pet. **The general rule of thumb is that 90% of your pet's calories should come from a high quality, well-balanced food and 10% can come from treats and supplements.** Everyone has their non-negotiable food items that they can't live without...and many times these can still be allowed in your pet's diet but in calculated amounts....and in moderation. **But watch out for high-calorie treats!** Remember, even bully sticks and rawhides have calories! A 6-inch bully stick has 88 calories in it! For a 50-pound dog, this would make up the dog's entire daily treat allowance! If a 10-lb dog gets a 6-inch bully stick, they are getting 30% of their daily calories from that one treat. The most common cause for weight gain or a pet failing to lose weight is giving them too many high-calorie treats or table scraps. Resist the sad puppy and kitty eyes! It just might save your pet's life.

Another thing to consider is nutrient loss during a weight loss plan. **If your pet is 20% or more overweight then you often can't just restrict the calories of their current diet for weight loss without resulting in nutrient loss or muscle mass loss.** Pets that are this much overweight typically have better success when being fed a prescription diet formulated for weight loss. These diets are designed to allow for the proper rate of weight loss without the risk of losing important nutrients and sometimes only a temporary diet change is needed. If your pet requires a different type of diet due to other underlying conditions, then we may be limited in how much weight we can expect to lose on that diet. But this may be a necessary compromise and your veterinarian will work with you to try to find the best balance.

Cats are not small dogs and so their dietary requirements are not the same. Cats evolved on a diet based on protein as opposed to humans and dogs that can eat a wide variety of vegetables, proteins, and fats. Since cats are obligate carnivores, the same dietary rules don't apply. Many cats will do better on a high protein, low carbohydrate diet for weight loss for this reason and your veterinarian will help you find the best diet for your feline fur baby.

### The Art of Changing the Diet

If a new diet is prescribed we recommend that you allow several days for the transition. In general, we recommend gradually adding the new diet over a one week period. Start by substituting one-quarter of the diet for one to two days, then increase to one-half total volume of food for another two days, then three-quarter new food for a final two to three days before

completely switching to the new diet.

### **Multi-Dog Households**

What do you do if one dog is normal weight and the other is diagnosed with obesity? While there are countless creative solutions to this problem, here are a few we've found successful:

- Feed separately – this is the ideal solution for multi-dog households. Feed the dog with obesity its diet in one room while feeding your other dog in another location, preferably out of view from the other dog and behind a closed door. After a prescribed time, generally 15 to 30 minutes, pick the food up until the next feeding.

- Do not leave food out while you're away. In this scenario, you can't be sure who ate what.

### **Multi-Cat Households**

Have more than one cat? Not sure how to make work? Meal feeding is your answer.

- Feed each cat separately – this is the ideal solution for multi-cat households. Feed the cat diagnosed with obesity in one room while feeding the other cat elsewhere. After a prescribed time, generally 15 to 30 minutes, pick up any remaining food up (or the empty bowl) until the next feeding.

- Feed the normal weight cat on an elevated surface where the cat with obesity can't easily reach.

- Do not leave food out while you're away.

- Microchip-reading automated food systems are now available for multicat households. Each cat either wears a collar that is scanned which then opens a pre-filled section of the bowl for that designated cat to eat. Other versions of these feeding systems scan the existing microchip that each cat has before opening.

***Before your veterinarian can recommend a target calorie goal for weight loss, they'll need to understand how many calories your pet currently consumes.***

***At the end of this handout you will find our calorie log to record all the food and treats your pet eats in one week. Do NOT start your pet's diet this week. Tracking your pet's normal calorie intake will help your veterinarian make better recommendations for weight loss. This can be emailed back to us when completed to [wovh@outlook.com](mailto:wovh@outlook.com)***

### **EXERCISE...GET MOVING!**

Calories won't get burned (to result in weight loss) by laying on the couch all day! All pets (especially our older and arthritic pets) benefit from consistent, low impact exercise rather than "weekend-warrior" outings that can lead to injury. Dogs with different conditions and of different ages will have different levels of ability and endurance, but in general, try to engage your dog in aerobic activity for at least ten to fifteen minutes twice a day.

**There is not a "one size fits all" exercise program for your pet.** Your veterinarian will help determine the best exercise program for your pet during the weight loss program. Here are a

few things to consider.....

### **Underwater Treadmills can help with weight loss**

Sometimes your pet needs a gym membership too!

Underwater treadmills are a great way to get your pet moving. The buoyancy of the water provides relief for sore joints in our older and arthritic patients and resistance jets and inclines can be added to challenge our younger athletes. Combined with calorie restriction, underwater treadmill therapy can significantly improve the success of any weight loss program.

Just like people, dogs can enroll in a fitness training program 2-3 times/week in which their exercise sessions are tailored specifically for their needs. These types of programs are very effective in kick-starting a weight loss program.

***Ask us about more information on our Therapeutic Exercise and Underwater Treadmill services offered by our rehabilitation veterinarian, Dr. Stephanie Badge Kindred, at our new Hamlin location!***

### **Some additional simple tips for getting your dog to move more are:**

- Move the food bowl upstairs or downstairs and rotate it so that the dog always has to walk to get to its food bowl. Dogs are smart, and if the food bowl moves upstairs, they'll start relocating upstairs, too.

***Only do this if your pet can comfortably and safely navigate stairs!***

- Move the food bowl as far away from your dog's favorite locations as possible to encourage movement.

- Use food dispensing toys, puzzle feeders, "Snuffle mats", "Kong Wobblers" and other similar products for at least one of your pet's meals each day. These are not only mentally stimulating but they make your pet work for food which burns calories.

### **A Note on Cats**

Our domestic cats are very similar to wild felines. While our dogs may enjoy a brisk walk or jog, our cats aren't designed for that sort of activity. Our cats prefer the hundred-yard dash to the marathon. It takes persistence and creativity to get a cat to exercise....check out some of our tips and tricks below for ideas!

- Play "Find the Food" - Move the food bowl upstairs or downstairs and rotate it so that the cat always has to walk to get to its food bowl. Cats are smart, and if the food bowl moves upstairs, they'll find it!

***As with dogs, only do this if your cat can comfortably and safely navigate stairs.***

- Move the food bowl as far away from your cat's favorite areas as possible.

- Use feather toys, flashlights, boxes, paper bags or balls, or 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. Experiment and understand that what is exciting today may be boring tomorrow...***but please never use string or yarn when playing with your cat as***

***this can cause serious issues if ingested.***

-Use puzzle toys, slow feeders, indoor hunting feeders, or food dispensing toys for at least one of their meals per day to help burn calories and keep their minds active.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY...RECHECKS AND WEIGH-INS**

### **Calorie Restriction + Exercise + Accountability = SUCCESS**

Accountability is important! ***We recommend doing weight checks on your pet every 2 weeks*** in the beginning of the weight loss program and then less frequently as your pet needs less fine-tuning. Each pet is different and may require changes in diet or routine before finding the ideal approach. It's most accurate to ***use the same scale each time*** and you are welcome to come in and use our scale so we can record the weights in your pet's medical record, or you can weigh your pet at home and call or email us with the updates. Digital baby scales that weigh in pounds and ounces are easy to find on-line for an affordable price and are ideal for accurately weighing small dogs and cats at home. Either way, we are here to help you keep track of your pet's progress and give recommendations along the way...weight loss is a team effort!

Most dogs and cats will achieve their ideal weight within six to nine months. If the process is taking longer than this, or if you are not seeing desired weight loss within 30 to 90 days, something needs to be changed.

## **LIFE HACKS TO BEAT THE BEGGING!**

What about the dog that wakes you up at four in the morning to be fed or the dog that stares at you during dinner or television time until you give in and feed them? Or the cat that smacks you in the face and yowls until you wake up to feed them? Our pets have trained us well and know exactly which buttons to press when it comes to getting their way. Here are some tips for handling the pleading pet:

- Pet or brush your dog or cat or play with it when it begs for food. Many pets (especially dogs) substitute food for affection so flip the equation and you may find that playtime displaces chowtime.

- Walk your dog or take it outside when it begs. The distraction and interaction may be just enough to make it forget its desire for food.

- Feed small meals frequently – especially give a last feeding for those pets that like to wake you up in the wee hours asking for more – divide the total volume or calories into four to six smaller meals – whatever you do, don't feed extra food.

- When the bowl is empty and your dog or cat is pleading, add a few kibbles to the bowl. By a few, try ten or fifteen for dogs and five or ten for cats – not a handful. And don't exceed the recommended daily feeding amount.

- For dogs, give vegetables such as baby carrots, broccoli, zucchini, celery and asparagus. Dogs love crunchy treats so make it a healthy – and low-calorie – choice. See our low treat calorie list below and stay within their treat allotment!

·Offer fresh water instead of food. Many pets love fresh water so when they are lurking near an empty food bowl, try filling up the water bowl with fresh water instead or letting them drink from a hose or faucet.

--Do not use a self-feeder. While this seems obvious, auto-feeders are nothing more than an unlimited food machine to a dog or cat. The same rule applies to community food bowls or indiscriminate refilling. Careful portion control and caloric restriction is the most effective and safe method to help your pet reach a healthy weight. If you must, use an automated feeder than dispenses a set amount of food several times per day....and you can even set it to feed at 4:00 am!

--If you're working on training with your pet then instead of using store bought treats, save a portion of their daily feeding amount in a special container and use pieces of their kibble as their training "treat." Often times it is said that feeding from a bowl is a "wasted opportunity" when it comes to training and enrichment.

### **FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS:**

***\*\*When recommendations are given in measurements of "cups" we are referring to an 8 ounce measuring cup and it should be filled level with the recommended amount. NO ROUNDED SCOOPS!\*\****

These recommendations were created specifically for

Current weight:

Body Condition Score: \_\_\_\_\_ (see our BCS link below to know what this is!)

Percent overweight: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal weight: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal rate of weight loss: \_\_\_\_\_ pounds per week

Recommended DAILY calories from DOG OR CAT FOOD: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount of FOOD to feed: \_\_\_\_\_ cups \_\_\_\_\_ times per day

Recommended DAILY calories from TREATS/SUPPLEMENTS/FOOD FOR MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION (see our low and high calorie treat list for treat options and their calorie amounts. Please only use the high calorie treats for special occasions or when a high reward is needed!)

Recommended diet: \_\_\_\_\_

Next weight recheck: \_\_\_\_\_ (come in and use our scale or call/email us with updates from home)

Your weight loss support team: Dr. Badge Kindred, DVM and (Please contact one of us for questions and updates regarding your pet's weight loss program!)

### **HELPFUL RESOURCES:**

- [Petobesityprevention.org](https://petobesityprevention.org)
- [Caninearthritis.org](https://caninearthritis.org)
- [Veterinarypartner.com](https://veterinarypartner.com)

### **BODY CONDITION SCORE CHART:**

<https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Body-Condition-Score-Dog.pdf>

<https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Cat-Body-Condition-Scoring-2017.pdf>

### **WANT TO SEE HOW MUCH YOUR PET WOULD WEIGH IF IT WERE A HUMAN? USE THIS TOOL TO FIND OUT THE HUMAN EQUIVALENT TO YOUR PET'S CURRENT WEIGHT:**

<https://petobesityprevention.org/pet-weight-translator>

## Calories in Treats

When it comes to where dogs get their daily calories, we recommend following the 90/10 rule. That means 90% of calories should come from complete and balanced food, and 10% from treats! But there are a lot of healthy, low-calorie options your dog will still consider a treat. Most of the time, just giving the treat to your dog is more important than what you give them!

Treats are typically given as a sign of affection or when training to reward certain behavior. To most dogs, the number of treats is more important than the taste! There are some instances when high value (i.e. high-calorie or extra tasty) treats are needed, but more often, low-calorie treats can be given with the same result—a happy dog!

Are treats allowed when my dog is on a diet?

Treats are often the culprit when dogs are overweight or having trouble losing weight. We have compiled a list of common human foods that can be used as treats, comparing the good (nutritious and low calorie) with the bad (deliciously high calorie).

You may be surprised to learn where a lot of extra calories are coming from! If you are giving store-bought treats, make sure that you know how many calories are in each treat—the bag should clearly indicate this.

- Here is a link to find the calorie content in virtually any human food: <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>

*Foods listed in the tables below are fresh, uncooked, and without any oil, butter, or other toppings. Giving your dog leftovers is not necessarily bad, but the calories will add up if you used anything to cook with and season the dish.*

### Low Calorie Treats

Treat/Food	Size	Calories	Notes/Tips
Asparagus	1 cup (8oz)	27	About 10 medium spears
Baby carrot (fresh, uncooked)	"large" 15g	5	Chop or slice into smaller pieces to make it go even further
Blueberries	1 cup (8oz)	85	About 135 small-medium blueberries
Broccoli	1 cup (8oz)	33	About 9 medium heads of broccoli
Canned pumpkin	1 tbsp	5	NOT pumpkin pie filling, plain canned pumpkin. This is a great substitute for peanut butter or cream cheese. Be careful too much pumpkin can cause diarrhea or constipation.
Celery	8 inch stalk	6	This is the clear winner of bang for your buck!
Green beans	1 cup (8oz)	33	Unsalted canned or fresh, uncooked
Snap peas	1 cup (8oz)	26	About 25 medium sized snap peas

### High Calorie Treats

Treat/Food	Size	Calories	Notes/Tips
Bully Stick	6 inch stick	90	You know what these are, right?
Cheddar cheese cubes	1 cube	25	1 cube, not so bad. More than one, probably too much. Break one cube into multiple pieces if needed
Cream cheese (full calorie)	1 tbsp	50	Better than peanut butter



Cream cheese (low fat)	1 tbsp	31	Better option
Marrow Bone	100g 0.5oz	786 125	Yikes! This should only be given as a special treat! Or once the marrow is eaten out, replace with canned pumpkin and freeze for a low-calorie option.
Peanut butter	1 tbsp	96	Yikes! Compare this to canned pumpkin!
Pill Pocket	1 capsule size	23	This is for the peanut butter and hickory smoked flavors, capsule and tablet size
Pill Pocket- Duck and Pea	1 tablet size	8	This belongs on low-calorie list! Unless you have a good reason otherwise, choose this flavor!
String cheese	1 stick, 28g	90	This will vary based on brand
RC Pill Assist Small	1 pocket	10	
RC Pill Assist M/LG	1 pocket	24	

*NOTE: We did not even include the following types of treats because we don't recommend them - Ever. That includes Pig ears, rawhide, Greenies, hooves, and cooked bones. These "treats" carry excessive risks of causing esophageal or intestinal blockage, and many are processed in China.*