

OBESITY

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

Approximately 40% of all Americans are obese. Unfortunately, this same number now applies to 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 the key to ensuring your pet lives as long and healthy as possible.

What is obesity?

Obesity is defined as weighing more than 30% of the ideal weight. With humans, this is fairly straightforward and can be determined by consulting weight and, height charts. Dogs and cats are often diagnosed as obese by 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 or widening 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 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 is another cause of obesity and weight problems. 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.

What can I do?

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

Encourage thirty-minute walks twice daily. Discontinue feeding table foods and treats. Instead, offer carrots, broccoli or veterinary-approved low-calorie treats.

Most pets can lose weight if you adhere to our recommendations. Weight loss is often a matter of diligence and persistence. Remember that the reason you are doing this is to help your pet loved one live as long and healthy as possible. Who knows, you both may benefit from this diet!