

Is your dog a healthy weight?

Over consumption of calories resulting in excess body fat (obesity) is the most common form of malnutrition in pets in the UK. A staggering 1 in 4 of our pets are overweight or obese.

Excessive weight and body fat has detrimental effects on health and will reduce your dog's lifespan. An overweight animal's lifespan is reduced by up to 2 years, compared to an animal of the same breed, that is a healthy weight. This is because overweight animals are at greater risk of:

- Arthritis – joints are put under added strain by carrying excess weight
- Heart disease – the heart has to work harder to pump blood around the body
- Diabetes mellitus
- Liver disease – especially cats
- Cancer
- Respiratory disease
- Increased blood pressure

Overweight animals are also at greater risk if they need a general anaesthetic, and excess body fat can make surgical procedures more complicated.

Risk factors for obesity include:

- Neutering – neutered animals require less calories than entire animals, and are more prone to obesity
- Age – obesity is more common in middle-aged animals, as they require less calories, and are often less active

How to tell if your pet is the right weight?

You should be able to easily feel your pet's ribs under the skin. If it is difficult to feel them, then your pet is overweight. Dogs should also have a waist-line, they should be narrower around the abdomen than they are around the chest – this is best seen by looking at your dog from above.

It is important to measure the amount of food you feed your pet each day, including all treats and tit-bits. Compare the amount you are giving to the guidelines on the food packaging – remember this is a general guide, and not specific to your dog.



If you are concerned about your pet's weight, make an appointment at the surgery to have your dog weighed, and speak to our nurse Nicky, for advice about how best to control your pet's weight.

Managing the overweight pet – tips on how to help your pet lose weight

There are two main things to consider when designing a weight loss programme for your pet; reducing calorie intake, and increasing exercise levels.

It is best to split your dog's daily food allowance into two or three small meals, rather than giving one large one. Each time an animal is fed, it takes energy to get the digestive system working. It will also help stop your pet from feeling hungry between meals.

Keep your pet out of the kitchen when you are cooking, and out of the dining areas during meal times. This will help reduce begging behaviour, and stop you having the urge to give them tit-bits.

Many commercial pet treats are full of calories. One digestive biscuit for a dog, is the equivalent to us eating a burger and chips. Try and eliminate treats from your pet's diet, or exchange them for lower calorie alternatives such as carrots, or apple. Simple plain rawhide chews are great for dogs' teeth, and contain few calories. Ice cubes are also great for dogs, as they get something to crunch but they contain no calories.

A specifically designed calorie-restricted diet is the most effective way to help your pet lose weight. These diets are designed to reduce the animal's body fat, whilst maintaining lean muscle mass. 'Light' or 'low-calorie' versions of commercial pet foods are not designed for weight loss, but to help your pet maintain a healthy weight, once they have lost the excess weight.

Increasing the amount of exercise your dog does, is important to help maintain your pet's health and help with the weight loss. Your pet will not lose weight by changing diet alone. If your dog is not accustomed to exercising, an exercise regime should be introduced gradually. Dogs should have at least 20-60 minutes of exercise per day. Swimming is an excellent form of exercise, as it reduces pressure on joints, and burns more calories than walking.



Before starting a weight loss programme, it is important to know what your pet weighs, and what is a healthy weight to aim for. We have scales at the surgery, which you can use during office hours to weight your dog – you don't need an appointment. In the first instance, we advise reducing the amount of food you feed your pet by 25%. It is important to keep a record of the amount of food you feed, and weigh your pet regularly (every 2-4 weeks) to monitor progress. It will take time for your dog to lose weight, but so long as you are strict with the regime, the weight loss will be quicker and easier.

For help and advice about any weight issues please contact the surgery on 01609 772036.