

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT FOR DOGS

Weight management is a very common problem, affecting as many as 40% of dogs. Overweight animals can experience some significant health risks:

- Difficulty obtaining a thorough physical exam
- Impaired breathing and heart function
- Stress on joints leading to arthritis or other orthopedic problems
- Skin irritation or infection
- Increased risks with anesthesia or surgical procedures
- Increased resistance to insulin in diabetic patients

Three steps to tell if your pet needs weight management:

1. Place your hands on each side of the chest and attempt to feel the ribs. If the ribs can be easily felt, your pet is in good body condition. If you have to push to find or feel the ribs, a layer of fat is probably obscuring them.
2. The abdomen of normal dogs should be tucked up when viewed from the side.
3. Dogs should have a waist when viewed from above.

While weight management problems can result from metabolic disease, more often the cause is that the animal is taking in more calories than they burn. Successful weight management requires a combination of diet and exercise. It is important to remember that the dog did not gain the weight in a short period of time so it is unrealistic to expect him or her to lose it all quickly.

Diet: Many commercial foods are available that restrict calories and may be recommended for different situations. Reduced calorie diets should be gradually introduced to the dog by mixing it with the normal food for one or two weeks. This slow transition helps the pet to adjust to the new diet. Weight management is more successful if the dog's daily food ration is divided into two or three meals rather than feeding free choice or only once a day. The dieting animal should be fed separately from other pets and not allowed access to anyone else's food. Dieting animals should also be kept out of rooms where food is being prepared and eaten to reduce begging and temptation.

Snacks and treats are frequently a part of the weight management problem. Fatty, salty, or high calorie snacks need to be traded for healthier choices, such as fruit, vegetables, or dry kibble pieces. Snacks should make up less than 10% of the dog's total daily calories. The last pages of this handout list different foods, snacks, and their calorie content.

Exercise: Activity is essential for a weight management program. Please don't try to vigorously exercise an overweight, out-of-condition pet! Instead, once some weight has been lost, begin short walks, gradually increasing the distance and time as the animal's tolerance allows. Activity should occur during the cooler part of the day, not during extremes of hot or cold weather.

Sustained weight management requires a change in your relationship with your dog. Instead of food-centered attention, substitute play time, teaching tricks, or other activities.

Chart your success! Weigh your pet every two to three weeks and plot the weight on a graph. This will also alert you if there are problems in your weight management plan.

The benefits of all your hard work include improved health and life expectancy, making the effort worthwhile!

To determine how much food and how many treats your dog should eat in one day, use the following information. First, see the attached list of breed standards and determine how much your pet should weigh; find that number on the graph below. Then, use the left side of the graph to tell you how many calories your dog should consume to reach his or her ideal weight. Finally, using the attached food and treat charts, calculate how many cups of food and how many treats your dog may eat in one day to meet its daily energy requirements for weight loss. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have questions!