

Obesity in Pets



Obesity has become an extremely important health problem in the Western world, not just for humans but for dogs and cats as well. Obesity in pets is associated

with joint problems, diabetes mellitus, respiratory compromise, and decreased life span; recent estimations suggest that up to 35% of dogs and cats in the U.S. suffer from Obesity. Your vet will determine your pet's Body Condition Score on a scale format.

How did my pet get so big when he/she doesn't really eat much?

There are some things to keep in mind about your pet and his/her weight gain:

- A cup of food depends on the cup: Food packages refer to actual measuring cups. Many mugs, coffee cups, and other scooping cups may not equal to a cup measure.
- Some breeds have genetic tendencies towards obesity.
- Children, and other family members, may be providing extra treats to your pet.

Why obesity is bad

A common justification for over-feeding treats is that a pet deserves a higher quality of life as a trade off for longevity. While this might on some level make sense, the other consequences do not make for higher life quality in the big picture.

Problems that can arise with obesity

- *Arthritis*
 - Over-weight pets have extra unneeded stress on joints, including the discs of the vertebrae. Extra weight leads to progression of joint degeneration and creates more pain.
- *Respiratory Compromise*
 - Obese pets have 1 to 2 inches of fat forming a constriction jacket around the chest. It becomes harder for to take deep breaths and coughing may result.
- *Diabetes Mellitus*
 - Extra body fat leads to insulin resistance in cats just as it does in humans. Obese cats have been found to have a 50% decrease in insulin sensitivity.
- *Reduced Life Span*
 - Studies have shown that pets kept on normal body condition lived a median of 2.5 years longer than their overweight counterparts.

What can I do?

As an initial step in obesity management is to be sure to rule out other health issues that might specifically cause obesity. Speak with your vet about further diagnostics. Also:

- There must be control over what your pet eats.
- Feed in meals; leaving food out encourages snacking. Feeding in meals makes it easier to feed multiple pets different foods or different amounts of food.¹

¹ Information provided by the Veterinary Information Network, Inc

² Image provided by Steve Koo, Chicago, IL