



OBESITY IN CATS AND DOGS

“How come you never see a fat animal in the wild?”

By: Denise Jeffries, Senior Surgical Technician

What is obesity?

The definition of obesity is body weight in excess of 15-20% over ideal weight. There are many causes for obesity in our domestic animals including over-eating, decreased exercise, lower metabolic rate, environmental or emotional factors, surgical contraception, breed disposition, hypothyroidism, Cushing’s disease, and overall lifestyle. Statistics show that 25-33% of cats and dogs are considered “grossly obese”.



“My pet seems happy, why should I be concerned?”

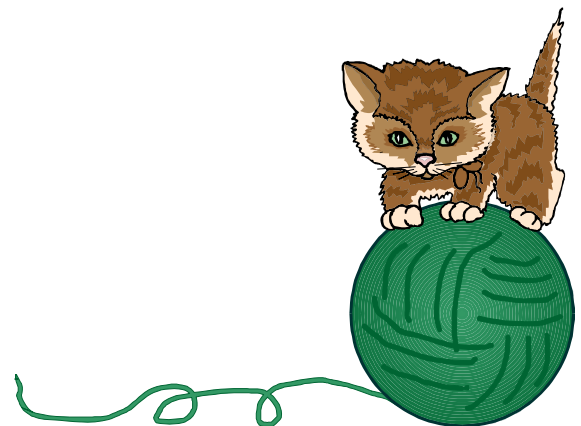
There are a lot of medical conditions attributable to obesity. Statistics show that “thin” animals live approximately two years longer than overweight animals. Obesity related problems can be as simple as intolerance to heat/ environmental changes and lack of physical activity, or as serious as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory problems, increased blood pressure and liver disease. Obese animals are also more likely to suffer from arthritis, joint deformity, ligament or tendon injuries and spinal disc disease. Additionally, there is a greater chance of bacterial infections, GI disease, skin infections and certain types of cancer in obese animals.



“What can I do to help my animal?”

Prevention is the key, so starting your puppy or kitten with proper nutrition, a positive feeding plan and exercise routine will increase their chances of a healthy, longer life.

If your pet is already overweight, the first step is talking to your veterinarian. Determining a “Body Condition Score”, ideal weight, feeding plan and exercise routine is essential to your animal’s success.



How do we measure obesity and develop a plan?

There are three simple ways to measure an animal's "Body Condition".

- First is with a physical examination by your veterinarian. With an exam, the doctor will be able to visually assess the animal and he/she will palpate the abdomen and body to see how much excess body mass there is on the animal.
- Second is body weight. Taking the animal's body size with their weight, we can determine an "ideal" body weight.
- Lastly the veterinarian should grade your pet on the Body Conditioning System.

This is a nine point grading system with one being too thin and nine being obese. After evaluating your dog/cat and taking a medical and behavioral history, your veterinarian may suggest running blood work on your pet. These tests will help your doctor to properly diagnose and treat your pet's obesity. Certain feeding habits will be discussed including set feeding times, amounts and type of food. You will be encouraged to increase your pet's activity level. There are many varieties of activities to fit you and your pet's life style.



Ad lib feeding (leaving food out at all times) is not recommended by any nutritionist or veterinarian. Also, all table food must be eliminated from your pet's diet. "People food" has a lot more calories in it than what is recommended for animals.



There are a few options with diet control that your veterinarian may discuss with you.

- The easiest option is to decrease the amount of food that your pet is on BUT this may have some negative effects such as hunger, begging, scavenging and a lack of the proper amount of vitamins and protein in their diet.
- Second is choosing a new diet for your pet. There are "over the counter" diets as well as some prescription diets that over time may help your pet to lose weight. Each food has different properties to help with weight loss. Including decreased fat, decreased calorie, high protein, high fiber or decreased carbohydrates. It may take a few food trials guided by your veterinarian to determine which works best for your pet.

Food for Thought:

Our pets depend on us to keep them healthy and happy. Weight management is something that you and our veterinary team can work on together to offer your pet a comfortable and active life. They can not feed themselves or go for a run/walk alone, they are looking to us to provide proper nutrition and exercise to live a long life with their human companion.