

## Obesity in Pets

Pets have no concept of the future, or of their health. Given the chance, this means that dogs and cats will over eat whenever possible! Unlike humans, they don't have the conscience to tell them that another treat will be bad for them.

Because of this, it's your responsibility as a pet owner to make sure you're regulating the amount of food your pet is eating. Staying in control of portion sizes and any extra treats will mean that your pet will stay at their optimum weight. You may think it's mean not to give your pet more food when they beg for it, but it's much meaner to let them get over-weight and unhealthy.

Over-weight or obese pets can face the same increased health risks as obese humans. Diabetes, liver problems and anxiety can all be brought on by obesity, and pre-existing conditions can be made much worse. Despite these risks, pet obesity is a rising problem.

It can be difficult to determine whether your pet is overweight. Unlike the BMI system used for humans, there's no universal scale to measure your pet up against. If you are concerned about the weight of your cat or dog, the best option is to take them to the Vet. They'll be able to give you advice.

If you've confirmed that your pet has a weight problem, it's important to take steps to rectify it.

- Look at the kind of pet food you are feeding your pet. Pets need less of some types of pet food to feel 'full' than others, so it might be worth making a switch. There are also specialist foods available for overweight pets.
- Think carefully about portion sizes. Some pet food manufacturers have come under fire for listing unnecessarily large portion sizes on their packaging. Experiment with portion sizes to see how much your pet *really* needs.
- Consider treats and scraps carefully. This is a particularly big issue for dog owners who use treats for training, or who feed scraps to their dog. There's nothing wrong with these things in themselves, but if you're regularly giving your dog this extra food, you need to make sure you regulate portions of their normal food accordingly.
- Encourage your pet to move more! For dog owners, this means taking longer walks with your dog, and letting them off lead more often. If you have a cat, increase the amount of time you spend playing with them. Balls, laser chasers and rod toys can all get your cat excited and get them moving.
- Cat owners might also want to consider a feed ball. These plastic balls are designed to fit a daily portion of dry food for a cat, but your cat will need to play with it in order to get the food out! Not only will this regulate your cats portion size, it'll also keep him active.

When it comes to over-weight or obese pets, the bottom line is that the problem is usually down to the actions of their owners. Cats and dogs eat what they are given, and you need to make sure that this is an appropriate and healthy amount.

If your dog or cat is getting food elsewhere, either from scavenging or being fed in other people's houses, get to the bottom of the issue and solve it. Remember: cats and dogs of optimum weight tend to live much longer and happier lives.