

Ask the Vet: Do I need to worry about my pet's weight?

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As the percentage of Americans carrying around extra weight increases, more and more pets seem to be overweight or obese as well. Many people are unaware that those extra pounds can cause some significant health issues for their animal. Many pet owners also don't realize that their dog or cat is overweight or they are in denial about the issue. We certainly see more overweight than skinny pets in the clinic.

Overweight animals are more likely to get arthritis as the extra pounds make the joints work harder. These animals are also at higher risk for tearing the ligaments in their knees like athletes can tear their ACLs. Diseases such as diabetes, kidney failure, hypothyroidism, heart disease, liver issues, and difficulty breathing are all associated with being overweight. The end result can be a shortened lifespan for your pet or a poorer quality of life.

As with humans, the main factors in being overweight are attributed to diet and exercise. Most pet food containers show the proper amount to be fed for the size of animal. However, the chart should be read for the pet's optimal size, not its current weight. Excessive feeding of treats can also contribute to excess weight, and 'people food' should be avoided. Even offering a small piece of meat or cheese to an animal weighing 15 or 20 pounds is like a person eating ten times that much! Many overweight animals are also quite inactive and can definitely use some exercise. If you have an obese dog, you probably don't want to start it out on an extreme exercise regimen right away as they will not be able to tolerate it. Start out with some shorter walks or play time. As they lose weight, their energy level will increase as well and they will be happy to go on some longer walks or jogs, enjoy some time playing in the yard or playing fetch. Get some toys for your cat to chase around and play with. Many cats also enjoy chasing a laser light across the floor.

With any weight loss program, you don't want to take too much weight off too fast. It is a gradual process, and it is good to track the progress through frequent weighing and charting. We have a walk-on scale for animals and would be glad to keep track of your pet's weight. If you have any questions or would like to start a weight loss program for your pet, please do not hesitate to contact us.