

Managing Weight



My vet says my pet is overweight. How can I help my pet lose weight?

Many pet owners don't know how many Calories (kcal) their pet should eat each day to maintain a healthy body weight. Your veterinary healthcare team can calculate this amount. Once you know the goal for your pet's daily calorie intake, you can develop a plan for delivering a certain amount of food at each meal and at snack time.

Some overweight pets remain active, while others do not. Talk with your family veterinarian about the activities your pet can or can't do. Most pets that can walk to their food bowl can also move around the home, so with a little encouragement and patience, you could position a meal (or treat) at the top or bottom of a staircase and your pet will burn a few calories to get to the food. This exercise can be done twice each day or several times throughout the week.

How long will it take for my pet to lose weight?

Overweight pets typically require many months to return to a healthy body weight. The slow progress is by design: the rate of weight loss should not be too fast. A general guideline for weight loss is between 0.5% and 2% of the pet's body weight per week.

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For example, if your dog weighs 88 pounds, and the family vet indicates the dog should lose 10 pounds to achieve a healthier body weight, with a target weight loss rate of 2% per week, then a reasonable goal is for the dog to lose just 0.2 pounds each week. With this example, it could take 11 or 12 months to reach the goal weight.

Does my overweight pet really need a veterinary therapeutic weight-loss diet?

Some overweight dogs and cats can lose weight after switching from a high-calorie (energy dense) food to a lower calorie food, but there are potential risks for nutrient deficiencies. Over-the-counter weight management products do not adjust nutrient concentrations for restricted calorie levels, and this can result in deficiencies of some nutrients like choline and arginine.

Calorie-restricted veterinary therapeutic diets are fortified with nutrients to avoid potential deficiencies. For this reason, many veterinary healthcare teams recommend switching overweight pets to a calorie-restricted veterinary therapeutic product during the weight loss period. We recommend **HPM spay-neuter** diet for both dogs and cats. This is a High Protein, High Fiber, Low Carbohydrate diet that addresses weight gain due to being spayed/neutered. **Hill's Metabolic Diet** is a proven diet for weight loss. Metabolic diet also has a version with joint support. These diets can be ordered from our website.

If my pet must go on a diet, can I still offer treats?

Yes, low-calorie treats are acceptable. Most commercial cat treats are about the size of your smallest fingernail and tend to be similar in calories: between 1 and 4 calories per treat. These are considered low-calorie pet treats. Dog treats are different because they vary widely in size and calorie content. Low-calorie commercial dog treats contain fewer than 15 calories per piece. There are plenty of low-calorie options to choose from.

Most fruits and vegetables that are served fresh, frozen, or plainly cooked (no butter, no salt, no condiments, no cheese on top) provide very few calories and make good treats when offered in moderation. Ex: Broccoli, green Beans, zucchini, carrots ****Never give grapes or raisins****

"A general guideline for all pets is that no more than 10% of the animal's total daily calories should come from treats, snacks, or people foods."

It's important to understand that "treating" your pet doesn't need to be associated with food. Our pets want our attention, and that can be provided in many forms, including petting, grooming, training, playing catch, going for a walk, or even watching a TV show together.

Besides putting my pet on a diet, what will help my pet lose weight?

Offering regular opportunities for movement or activity is vital to keeping your pet's joints and muscles limber, and for losing weight. You don't have to devote an hour to exercise or fitness training, but you should increase your pet's activity by a minute or two each day.

You should make sure your pet has daily movement to stretch its back, flex its muscles, stretch its joints, and maybe even play. Just a few minutes of movement and stretching offered two or three times each day can improve both attitude and overall health for your pet - and for you.

You can help your pet burn calories around the house by placing food and water bowls at the top or bottom of a staircase, so the animal must walk upstairs to access food and downstairs to access water. Another option is to invest in a timed automatic feeder, which dispenses controlled amounts of food at set times each day. A third option is to use food puzzles instead of a food bowl; this approach requires the pet to work with each puzzle to extract or remove the food. There are commercial food puzzles available online, as well as many ideas for making your own.

What if my pet hasn't lost any weight?

Make sure that all family members are following the plan you established with your vet. When there is no progress, it is reasonable to assume that neighbors, friends, or pet sitters might be offering treats or people foods. If so, tell them about the weight loss plan and enlist their help.

When a pet's weight loss appears to have slowed or stopped, it might be time to switch to a different veterinary therapeutic calorie-restricted food. Discuss the options with your veterinarian.

How do I manage friends and family who won't help with my pet's weight loss program?

This can be a very frustrating position for an owner. Make sure that your family clearly understands why the weight loss program is so important for the health and quality of life of the pet. Clearly communicate the weight loss goals and the steps everyone needs to take to help your pet.

If possible, involve your family in the process. Tell them when and where and how much the pet needs to be fed. If there are treats allowed, count out how many can be given each day, and place that number in a container on a counter or shelf. When the container is empty, then everyone knows there are no more treats to be given that day.

In addition to pre-measuring the pet's treats, you can also pre-measure the amount of food for each meal. This helps to keep food portions consistent from day to day.