



OBESITY

With the New Year here, it's a time when many of us re-evaluate our health and lifestyles, but it's also a great time to take a good look at our pets' physical condition. Unfortunately obesity in our pets is a huge problem and not only is it very common; it also predisposes our beloved pets to a wide range of very serious health problems.

A pet being overweight causes excess stress on joints, which leads to the progression of joint degeneration and creates more pain. Obesity also compromises the respiratory system; it makes the pet less able to take deep breaths as more work is required to move the respiratory muscles. Furthermore, just as in humans, extra body fat leads to insulin resistance in pets causing diabetes.



In addition, when an overweight cat goes off food or partially off food due to illness or psychological stress, body fat is mobilized to provide calories. Unfortunately, the cat's liver was not designed to process a large amount of body fat and a condition called hepatic lipidosis develops.

Causes:

Some animals simply have the genes that predispose them to obesity. Dog breeds with genetic tendencies towards obesity include the: Golden Retriever, Cocker Spaniel, Dachshund, Beagle, Shetland Sheepdog, Boxer, Cairn Terrier, Basset Hound, Cairn Terrier, and Labrador Retriever. This might be genetic as mentioned or it might be the result of a disease such as hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease. Testing for health problems such as these is helpful to get the best treatment for resolution of the obesity.

Our feeding habits are often a main contributing factor. Free feeding as opposed to portion control promotes snacking. Many people also express their affection for the pet by providing regular treats or table scraps, but a few treats can add up to being equal to feeding an extra meal.

What Can Be Done?

There must be control over what the obese pet eats, which can be tricky in a multi pet household. Feeding in meals is also important, this makes it easier to feed multiple pets different diets or different amounts of food. It is also recommend that feeding cats canned food as opposed to dry food can aid in weight loss, as it is higher in protein and lower in carbohydrates.



Tiger playing with his SlimCat™ food motivated weight loss toy

Exercise is an important facet in the weight loss process. Increasing the number of walks or their length is helpful. You can also consider interactive toys that can be used when you are not home to help get your pet moving. For the less play motivated pet, food motivated weight loss toys are a great option.

As an initial step in obesity management, be sure to rule out health issues that might cause obesity, your veterinarian can help with diagnostic tests to determine if this is the cause of weight gain. From there, set up your pets weight loss plan, your veterinarian can recommend prescription diets and help you figure out your pets ideal weight, and how many calories to feed daily to help you achieve this. Our clinic sells different prescription diets recommended for weight loss. Royal Canin makes a diet called 'Calorie Control', and Hill's makes a diet called 'Metabolic Advanced Weight Loss Solution', which is clinically proven to naturally work with each pet's unique metabolic response to support healthy weight loss and maintenance. By taking measurements of the pet, your veterinarian is able to calculate the pets ideal body weight and formulate a daily feeding schedule and calculate a safe timeline in which you will be able to reach your pets weight loss goal.



Although getting your pet to lose those extra pounds is difficult and frustrating, remember that being in good physical condition will not only help extend you pets life span but also their quality of life.