

Is My Pet Overweight?

Introduction

Maintaining a healthy weight is essential for your pet's overall well-being. Excess weight can lead to serious health issues, reduce your pet's quality of life, and even shorten their lifespan. Understanding what a healthy weight looks like and how to achieve it can help your pet live a longer, happier life. This guide provides information on assessing your pet's weight, daily activity goals, obesity-related diseases, and weight management strategies.

How Do I Know if My Pet is Overweight?

Obesity is a common health concern for pets. A pet is considered overweight if it is 10-20% above their ideal body weight and obese if they are over 20% above their ideal weight.

- **Dogs:** Even a few extra pounds can impact your dog's health. If your dog weighs 15% over their ideal weight, they are considered overweight, and at 30% over, they are obese.
- **Cats:** A cat that weighs 10-15% over their ideal weight is overweight, and a cat 20% over their ideal weight is obese.

What Should My Pet Look Like? (Ideal Body Shape)

Your pet's body condition score (BCS) is a useful way to assess their weight.

- **Ribs:** You should be able to feel your pet's ribs with a light touch but not see them prominently.
- **Waist:** When viewed from above, your pet should have an hourglass shape with a visible tuck behind the ribs.
- **Abdomen:** From the side, there should be a slight tuck upwards toward the hind legs. **Note:** Cats naturally have a small fat pad on their lower abdomen, which does not necessarily indicate obesity. Unlike dogs, cats do not have a pronounced tuck-up.

If your pet lacks a waistline, has a sagging abdomen, or you cannot feel their ribs, they may be overweight.

Daily Activity Goals for Dogs and Cats

Regular exercise is crucial for maintaining a healthy weight and overall well-being.

- **Dogs:**
 - Aim for at least **30-60 minutes of physical activity** per day.
 - Activities can include walking, running, swimming, or playing fetch.
 - For less active dogs, shorter frequent walks and interactive play sessions are beneficial.
- **Cats:**
 - Cats should engage in **at least 15-30 minutes of activity** per day.
 - Use interactive toys, laser pointers, or food puzzles to encourage movement.
 - Provide climbing structures like cat trees and scratching posts to promote activity.

Diseases Associated with Obesity

Being overweight increases your pet's risk for several serious health conditions, including:

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- **Arthritis and joint pain** – Extra weight puts added strain on joints.
- **Diabetes** – Especially common in overweight cats.
- **Heart disease** – Increased fat affects circulation and heart function.
- **High blood pressure (Hypertension)** – Excess weight can contribute to elevated blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart and kidney disease.
- **Respiratory issues** – Excess weight can lead to difficulty breathing.
- **Kidney disease** – Obesity is linked to a higher risk of kidney dysfunction over time.
- **Hepatic lipidosis (Fatty liver disease in cats)** – Rapid weight loss or prolonged obesity can lead to a life-threatening liver condition in cats.
- **Reduced lifespan** – Obesity can shorten your pet's life by 2 years or more.
- **Increased risk of anesthesia complications** – Extra fat can affect how your pet metabolizes medications.

Weight Loss Goals & Healthy Weight Management

If your pet needs to lose weight, slow and steady weight loss is the safest approach.

- **Goal:** Aim for a **1-2% weight loss per week** based on their total body weight.
- **Dogs:** Depending on their size, they may lose **0.5 to 2 pounds per month**.
- **Cats:** Safe weight loss is about **0.5 to 1 pound per month** (rapid weight loss can cause liver disease in cats).

Guides to Help with Weight Loss

1. **Portion Control & Diet**
 - Measure food with an actual measuring cup or scale.
 - Feed a high-protein, low-calorie diet formulated for weight loss.
 - Consider prescription weight loss diets if needed.
2. **Scheduled Feedings Instead of Free Feeding**
 - Set meal times instead of leaving food out all day.
 - Use slow feeder bowls to encourage mindful eating.
3. **Low-Calorie Treats & Alternative Rewards**
 - Use healthy treats like kibble, carrots, green beans, or lean meats.
 - Reduce treat intake or replace with affection and playtime.
4. **Increase Daily Activity**
 - Gradually increase walks or play sessions.
 - Use food puzzles or toys to encourage movement during meals.
5. **Regular Weigh-Ins**
 - Weigh your pet every **2-4 weeks** to track progress.
 - Adjust diet and exercise as needed with veterinary guidance.

If you are concerned about your pet's weight, we can help develop a personalized weight loss plan. Schedule a visit with us at **Franktown Animal Clinic** to discuss the best approach for your pet's health!

Franktown Animal Clinic

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