



Obesity and Diet

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Our pets are becoming obese at an alarming rate, just like modern human culture. It is estimated over 30% of all pets are obese, a health issue that can lead to diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses. However, dogs and cats face a number of challenges when it comes to weight control. Namely, they cannot choose the food or the volume of food they are fed. We offer our pets treats for good behavior or because we feel bad that we have left them alone all day. Coupled with that is the amount of time spent inside while pet parents are off at work. Inappropriate diet and a sedentary lifestyle lead to pet obesity. Fortunately, there is hope. With the right food and proper exercise, pets can lose weight and keep it off.

Extra glucose that is not used by the cells because of limited exercise or excess dietary intake becomes stored as fat in special cells called adipocytes. These adipocytes are not static, they actually secrete molecules into the body that act as hormones. These hormones in turn affect insulin and blood sugar levels and may provoke inflammation. So the goal is to minimize the number of adipocytes in the body through diet and exercise. Diet is the easiest place to start.

The most important step in a weight loss program is selecting the diet. Dogs and cats not only require dietary fat and protein, they thrive on it. Their physiology is different from ours; they do not require dietary carbohydrates for cellular energy. Their body is designed to convert fat and protein molecules into glucose in the liver, a process called gluconeogenesis. In fact, cats that are fed carbohydrate-rich foods have a higher risk of developing diabetes because their liver is constantly making glucose regardless of dietary carbohydrates. Dogs are different, if they are fed carbohydrate-rich foods, their liver will stop making glucose – cats can't do this.

There is much talk about low fat and high fiber diets for weight loss. Unfortunately, this is not always the best diet. Fiber over 7% may reduce the digestibility of nutrients, cause flatulence, and increase fecal output. Cats do poorly on a diet with over 5%. As for fat, reducing total fat may interfere with absorption of fat soluble vitamins and can lead to dry flaky skin. Some fat is required even when on a weight loss diet.

Reducing caloric intake will help your pet lose weight. Feed to your pets' ideal weight. For example, if your dog weighs 40 lbs but should be 30 lbs, feed your dog the amount of food for a 30 lb dog. Since calories are reduced, it is crucial that the food your pet does consume is nutrient dense to supply the proper levels of vitamins and minerals. Pets on a weight loss program need a quality diet with a high nutrient to calorie ratio – it may be dangerous to feed a food just because it is low calorie. It is far better to switch to a low carbohydrate, high protein diet while also reducing the total number of calories the pet consumes on a daily basis. As was just mentioned, reducing the carbohydrate intake in pets will force the liver to use stored fat (adipocytes), converting it into glucose to supply the cells with energy. Thus, your pet will begin to lose stored fat, which is the ultimate goal.

Once weight loss has begun, it is paramount that the pet maintain lean body mass. The last thing we would want is a pet to lose muscle mass. Feeding a high protein diet will maintain and build muscle without jeopardizing weight loss. Raw diets and grain-free diets are high in animal based protein and low in carbohydrates. A rotation diet that includes raw, canned, and kibble will help your pet maintain an ideal weight and nutritional state.

Some additional information can be found at: <http://www.petobesityprevention.com/index.htm>

Step 1: Visit your veterinarian.

Before beginning any weight loss program or change in exercise intensity, we recommend you visit with your veterinarian. Obesity leads to a number of health conditions such as cardiac disease, diabetes, and arthritis. Your pet should have a complete physical to confirm he is healthy for a weight loss diet or new exercise program. Your pet should not lose more than 2% of body weight per week, so some vets may have you stop by for a weight check periodically. Also, if your pet is on insulin for diabetes, a weight loss program may alter his insulin requirements, something that should be monitored under the guidance of a veterinarian.

Step 2: Switch to high protein.

Carbohydrates are counterproductive to weight loss. Choose a diet high in animal based protein and low in carbohydrate such as Nature's Variety Raw Frozen Diets and Instinct. This will reduce blood sugar spikes and help preserve lean body mass during weight loss. Meat-based diets with fruit, seed, and vegetable also supplies isoflavones, biomolecules that have been shown to mitigate obesity-related inflammation and diseases. While soy is the number one source of isoflavones, it is difficult to digest, often leading to flatulence. Legumes such as alfalfa and green beans, cruciferous vegetables and seeds are the second best sources of naturally occurring isoflavones. Nature's Variety includes these ingredients in Raw Frozen Diets and Instinct.

Step 3: Switch diet form.

Extruded kibble tends to be higher in calories compared to a raw or canned diet. This is because it is dried and contains less than 10% moisture. Raw and canned, however, contain 60-75% moisture. So for the same volume, a pet fed raw or canned will receive fewer calories without sacrificing nutrient content; they will feel full and satisfied when fed raw or canned. Raw or canned may be mixed with kibble or fed as a stand-alone diet. Nature's Variety offers canned food in several styles and meat species to please all pets. Going one step further, raw is preferred over canned because it provides biologically correct nutrition more conducive with your pets' natural physiology. This means a pet is able to extract nutrients in raw food more efficiently and completely than a cooked food.

Step 4: Switch treats.

Biscuits or semi-moist treats are high in carbohydrates and fat. Switching to a lean turkey jerky, beef liver, pizzelle stick, or bone is easy to do and will provide your pet with a longer, more satisfying treat occasion – they will spend more time chewing the treat and less time begging. Nature's Variety Freeze-dried medallions broken into smaller pieces are a great low carbohydrate training treat. Never feed table scraps. Frozen green beans and carrots make excellent low-calorie alternatives to treats of any type.

Step 5: Switch lifestyle.

Exercise is the best way to lose weight and build muscle. As your pet loses weight, their energy will increase. Likewise, a low carbohydrate diet will increase your pet's energy level. Thus, the task of increasing the amount of exercise will be easy to achieve. Walking and swimming is easiest on the joints of overweight dogs, but as the weight comes off, be prepared for a dog that wants to go jogging! Hiding food or treats in a toy encourages your pet to work at retrieving it – a great form of physical and mental exercise that can be done while you are away at work. For cats, exercise is harder and may require purchasing toys or activity centers to keep them moving and active while you are away.

Step 5. Celebrate success!