

## Obesity in Dogs – Uh-oh, is Fido Fat?

You may have suspected it, but a visit to the veterinarian with your dogs confirms the fact that your beautiful canine is overweight. Actually, you shouldn't be too surprised as obesity in our pets, just as obesity in humans has reached epic proportions. You have done your best to feed your dog a healthy and nutritious diet, yet; somehow, you have provided her with more than the daily intake of calories she requires. You may have provided too little activity or exercise. You may have given her extra treats as “rewards” for good behavior or simply to make her happy. Any which way, it is time to deal with the inevitable – placing your dog on a healthy diet, exercise regimen and nutritional program. Proper nutrition will enhance your dog's longevity as well as her quality of life.

Obesity is the most common nutritional problem veterinarians encounter in dogs and cats today. Being overweight can result in a wide variety of serious health problems for your pet, including heart disease, urinary problems, arthritis, cancer, endocrine issues and cancer. Overweight dogs are at higher risk in surgery, more prone to injury and experience greater stress on their hearts, livers, kidneys and joints. Excess weight can worsen respiratory problems and exacerbate osteoarthritis. Excess weight can lead to diabetes mellitus and generally diminish the overall quality of your pet's life. Obesity can also decrease your pet's life expectancy. Obesity is an issue that necessitates serious thought and consideration as well as change in your pet's lifestyle.

The lives of our pets are generally shorter than our own. Therefore, if we are hoping for our pet to live a long, happy and healthy life, it is imperative that we provide our pets with a healthy lifestyle, sound nutritional program and a regular exercise regimen. It is as important for our pets to eat healthily and exercise frequently as it is for us as human beings. Once we have made the decision to adopt a pet, the animal is ours to care for until its death. We are the one and only caregiver of our vulnerable and trusting canine or feline friend, companion and beloved family member. Our pet's life is completely dependent upon us. We are responsible for her overall care, health and well being.

To assess whether Fido really is “fat”, note the following:

Obese dogs have heavy fat over their ribs, along the spine and around their tails. The waist may be “absent” or unidentifiable. Morbidly obese dogs have protruding abdomens and fat deposits throughout their bodies. The belly area between the rib cage and rear end are prominent.

Obese dogs may walk slowly and uncomfortably.

They may experience damage to bones, joints or ligaments;

They may breathe and pant heavily when walking or exercising'

Their heart rate may be increased to unhealthy levels;

They may exhibit decreased stamina;

They may exhibit heat intolerance;

They may have an increasing number of digestive disorders;

They may develop dry, flaky skin;

They may overheat more rapidly than leaner, healthier dogs.

They may experience heart disease and increased blood pressure;

They may have an increased risk of cancer;

Have your pet examined by your veterinarian. Consult with him or her to determine what weight loss regimen is most effective and beneficial for her. If your vet puts Fido on a diet, do your best to adhere to the requirements of this health plan:

Limit the amount of food and snacks he gets;

Cut back the amount of kibble in his food bowl;

Feed healthy snacks if you “must” give him any at all: choose green beans, carrots or other low-calorie vegetables, unbuttered popcorn, organic or apple slices, etc. as per the advice of your vet;

Watch the fat content of the food you are purchasing & look for a diet with similar ingredients but fewer calories;

Watch the fat content in the food you buy’

Check the supplements you use for value & caloric quantity;

Keep Fido away from the dining table at meal time so that there is no temptation to your pet to beg or for you & your kids to give him unhealthy, fattening snacks.

Exercise your pet gradually and with the advice/consultation of your vet. Short sessions of low or moderate activity are a great way to begin this program i.e. a walk around the block, a regular obedience class or obedience routine are good ways to begin your pet’s exercise regimen.

Obesity affects approximately 25 percent of the U.S. canine population. Make certain that your dog is not a member of this population. Keep him healthily fed and exercised. Take no chances with your best friend’s health. Give him your love and a healthy dose of nutritional well-being and daily exercise.

