

Overweight to Great: The Basics of Pet Obesity

Pet owners and veterinary professionals share a common goal: to maximize the quality – and quantity – of our companion animals' lives. A healthy weight plays a critical role in achieving this goal but sadly it is estimated that over 50% of dogs and cats in North America are overweight or obese. The good news is that, once recognized, this disease can be treated in partnership with a veterinarian to ensure safe and effective weight loss.

A key aspect of a weight loss program is caloric restriction and this should be done using a veterinary prescription weight loss diet. These complete diets have a careful balance of nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, so that they can be fed at a restricted caloric intake without compromising nutrition. Feeding regular diets – even “light” ones – in restricted quantities results in a reduction of essential nutrients, potentially creating a nutritional deficiency over time.



To ensure a successful weight loss program the pet must be fed accurately. While using a measuring cup is a great place to start, research shows that they are surprisingly inaccurate. The best way to ensure precise feeding is to weigh the food using a gram scale, which are becoming commonplace in North American kitchens. One major issue frequently encountered in multi-cat households is feeding them separately; it's impossible to feed precise amounts if this cannot be done. Devices now exist in the market – some using a cat's identification microchip – to make this easily achievable.

Exercise also plays an important role in successful weight loss. To reduce the risk of injury, exercise programs should be introduced carefully under the supervision of a veterinarian. Activity trackers now exist for dogs, making it easier for owners to remain accountable for their pet's exercise. Increasing activity level in cats can be accomplished through various strategies including introducing interactive food-dispensing toys that require cats to “work” for their food.

While safe weight loss programs require significant commitment, the benefit to a pet's quality of life is well worth the effort! With the support of a veterinary team, the goal of transforming a pet from overweight to great comes within reach.

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