

OBESITY/WEIGHT CONTROL

Why Is Obesity Important?

- Obesity is not cute. It's a disease. Any animal whose body weight is 15% or more than it should be suffers from obesity. It is important because it predisposes to so many other diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, heat intolerance, fatty liver, increased surgical/ anaesthetic risk, decreased resistance to common diseases and slower recovery from illness.
- Thus obesity in pets carries health risks just as in humans. In animals, however, the risks are concentrated into a much shorter life span.
- Obesity is a completely curable condition which is completely in the hands of the person who feeds the animal. By helping your pet lose a few kilograms, you can help it live a longer, healthier and happier life.
- Although obesity is influenced by genetic make-up, metabolic rate, hormone effects, behaviour and character, studies show that the majority of obesity in animals is due to the over-consumption of calories in relation to their energy needs. In other words, your pet is eating too much and not getting enough exercise!

Dealing with Obesity:

- Accept that you are killing your pet when you overfeed. Every extra calorie is shortening your pet's life. The whole family, including children and domestic helpers need to be aware of the importance of your pet's diet.
- Some clinical conditions such as diabetes and thyroid disease are associated with obesity. Have your vet examine your pet before starting a weight reduction program.
- Place your pet onto an appropriate weight reduction diet. Your vet can advise you which diet is most suitable for your animal. This might be a commercially available diet, or in more severe cases, a prescription diet which your vet can provide. A weight reduction diet contains reduced calories, but correct concentrations of essential proteins and fatty acids, minerals and vitamins. If you attempt to treat obesity by feeding reduced amounts of a normal diet you may cause deficiency diseases in your pet.
- Be careful not to overdo the weight loss! Aim for your pet to lose 0.5% of body weight per week up to a maximum of 2%. Take extra care with cats, as they are at risk of developing fatty liver disease (hepatic lipidosis) if their weight is reduced too quickly.
- **CARE** with treats. This is the greatest cause of obesity, and of failure to lose weight. Give healthy, low calorie treats if you must, such as small pieces of carrots or boiled/steamed chicken, but make sure to cut down on the amount fed at meal time afterwards.
- If your pet is a fast eater and woofs down their food consider investing in an interactive, slow feeder such as those made by Northmate (<http://northmate.com/category/products/green/>).
- It is better to feed 2-3 small meals a day. This increases the metabolic rate, and so increases the rate of weight loss.
- **ONLY** give water to drink. It is a common misconception that cats need milk, in fact dairy products can cause gastrointestinal disease in many cats.
- Provide non-food related attention – more exercise and more games.
- Ask your veterinary surgeon for a target weight, and monitor your pet's weight weekly. This will give you an idea of progress, and the motivation to keep going. It will also provide the basis for your vet to give further advice. Be committed to the weight loss program.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONSULT YOUR VETERINARY SURGEON

