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Independant, Kind and Honest Veterinary Care in the Heart of Ryedale

Obesity in dogs and cats

Obesity is now a major health problem in our dogs and cats, affecting around 50% of the population. The following information explains the causes and consequences of obesity and suggests practical advice to prevent weight gain and reduce weight in dogs and cats.

Why do pets become overweight?

- Overfeeding is the main cause, either too much calorific food at meal times, too many inappropriate tit-bits or scavenging.
- Lack of exercise. This may be due to owner circumstances or the animal"s inability to exercise because of an orthopaedic or cardiac problem for example. Older animals will be less active and so should be fed accordingly.
- Breed – some breeds are more prone to weight gain such as Labrador retrievers, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and mixed breed cats.
- Neutering - both castration and spaying increase the likelihood that animals will become overweight. Many animals should receive a lighter diet once they have recovered from their neutering operation.
- Diseases such as an under-active thyroid gland in dogs may lead to increased weight.
- If puppies/kittens become overweight then they actually produce more fat cells, which means that weight loss becomes much harder.

Is your pet overweight?

Weights of normal dogs can differ tremendously even between animals of the same breed. If you are worried that your pet may be overweight then please bring it to the surgery to be weighed. We will also check the animals body condition which if often more useful. You should be able to feel the ribs of the animal but not easily feel the spine, a visible “waist” should be present.

Nurse clinics

Our nurses run a free weight clinic to help pets lose weight. This involves calculating how much food to feed and weighing your pet on a regular basis to en

sure weight is lost safely and not too quickly. We can monitor your dogs progress and help to achieve their target weight. Please ask at the surgery for more details.

Consequences of obesity

These are fairly familiar to us as similar consequences are seen in overweight humans.

- Heart problems
- Arthritis worsens with increased body weight
- Breathing problems as fat is laid down inside the chest which reduces the space for lung expansion.
- Diabetes mellitus and liver failure (main problems seen in obese cats)
- Self-grooming problems especially in overweight cats.
- Skin problems particularly in folds of fat.
- Decreased immunity
- Decreased fertility

Weight loss

It can be difficult to get your animal to lose weight. Here are some methods of dieting your pet.

1. A common starting point is to reduce the volume of food. The problem with this is that the animal is hungrier and also may not be getting the correct amount of essential nutrients.
2. Commercially available „light" diets can help susceptible animals from gaining weight but they do not usually help an animal lose weight.
3. Increasing the amount of exercise will help if the animal is fit enough.
4. Reducing the amount, type and size of tit-bits. Obviously the feeding of tit-bits can be essential to training and we dont want to spoil your dogs enjoyment of life when we put it onto a diet. If tit-bits are to be fed then take these into account when feeding the main meal, feed only small „pea-sized" amounts - the dog will still appreciate the reward. Reward your pet with affection and toys rather than food. Feed raw or cooked vegetables as treats. Low calorie treats are available which resemble "bonios" and are very palatable.
5. Prescription diets – We find these diets to be the most successful ways of dieting pets.

- They are severely restricted in calories but bulked out with fibre so that animals are „filled up".

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- These diets are only sold at veterinary surgeries so that normal animals are not fed them accidentally.
- There are several brands of reducing diets on the market. We stock Royal Canin Obesity Management and Satiety Support. We use 2 prescription diets, both are very similar however the Satiety Support is used in dogs with a big appetite which may need a larger portion to feel full. A 32% larger portion size of the Satiety Support can be given for the same calorie content as the Obesity Management. If your animal is not suited to this diet we can try other brands. Royal Canin is available for cats and dogs. For dogs the diet is available in dry or tinned forms. For cats the diet is available in dry form or in pouches. A daily amount is calculated for your animals target weight and no more than this amount should be fed. A combination of dry and tinned food can be given. We will give you a cup to measure the dry food.
- Royal Canin also contains L-carnitine. This is a water-soluble vitamin which aids in the conversion of fat to energy.
- A problem that sometimes occurs with high fibre diets is that the volume of faeces may increase. This can be a problem for owners, as animals may need to defecate at inappropriate times. This can usually be worked around by feeding the animal at a different time.
- Your animal should gradually (over 10 days) be introduced to the new diet. They may not eat it at first as the salt content is lower than many commercial foods.
- Splitting meals is recommended (2-3 times a day) each measured as part of the daily allowance.
- Animals remain on Obesity Management or Satiety Support until they have reach their target weight. They then need to go onto a diet, which will prevent weight gain in the future, e.g. Royal Canin Weight Control or Satiety Support for dogs and Royal Canin Diabetic for cats.

We run regular weight clinics and free weight checks to help monitor your pet‟s progress and give you advice in achieving the target healthy weight.