

## 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?**

- x Overfeeding is the main cause, either too much calorific food at meal times, too many inappropriate treats or scavenging.
- x Lack of exercise. Inability to exercise because of an orthopaedic or cardiac problem for example. Older animals will be less active and so should be fed accordingly.
- x Breed some breeds are more prone to weight gain such as Labrador retrievers, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and mixed breed cats.
- x 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.
- x Diseases such as an underactive thyroid gland in dogs may lead to increased weight.
- x 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 animal's body condition which is often more useful. You should be able to feel the ribs of the ani-

### **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



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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“.

