



Shepherd Veterinary Clinic

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FAT CATS AND PUDGY POOCHES

They may be fat and happy, but they may also be in danger.

What is obesity?

Obesity is an excess of body fat that has built up to the point of affecting your pet's health and body function. The amount of body fat that will impair health is thought to be about 25 percent above ideal weight. This ideal weight will be different between dogs and cats and from breed to breed.

Why should I be concerned about this condition?

Obese pets can have severe problems with their muscles and bones, a greater amount of skin disease, and diabetes. If they must undergo surgery, they are more likely to have a bad reaction to the anesthesia and the operation itself. They do not tolerate heat or exercise and have a greater risk of heart disease.

How common is obesity in dogs and cats?

About one in every four pets is overweight.

What can cause this problem in my pet?

Eating a high-fat diet is one of the causes of obesity in pets. Middle-aged dogs and cats – those between 5 and 10 years old – are the pets that most often develop this problem.

How can I tell if my pet is obese?

You can look at your pet, feel the animal's ribcage and abdomen, and make a preliminary judgment as to whether the animal is obese.

What can I do if my pet is obese?

You must put the animal on a deliberate weight-loss program. You must be in control of four things: The type of food you feed the pet, the amount and frequency you feed, the type and amount of exercise, and the elimination of between-meal treats. A high-fiber, low-fat food is the best to use in a weight-loss program.

While you are feeding your dog or cat a diet that has fewer calories, you must not increase the total amount of food given each day, even if the pet begs. Increasing the amount of food will only bring the total calories back to a high level.

You also do not want to lower the amount of food so much that the pet loses weight too fast. Rapid weight loss may lead to weight rebound in dogs and to liver problems in cats. Feeding several times daily in smaller quantities each time is best because eating itself burns calories and you may also reduce begging by the pet.

Exercise is another crucial ingredient in your pet's weight-loss program because it burns up calories and keeps the animal's body lean.

How may my veterinarian assist in treating this problem?

Your veterinarian is the one who can determine if your cat or dog is actually obese and can inform you of your pet's ideal weight so you can know what to aim for in the pet's weight-loss program.

The veterinarian will monitor the pet's progress over time to ensure the weight-loss program is achieving its goals and the pet's health is improving.

What can I do to prevent this pet or any new pets I acquire from becoming obese?

Throughout any dog or cat's life, keep careful tabs on its ribs and observing its abdominal size. Use the pet food manufacturer's recommended daily servings only as an initial guide, and accurately measure each portion and adjust as needed to maintain ideal body condition.