



**MANOR**  
VETERINARY CLINIC

# **Overcoming Obesity**



**Health problems in overweight dogs and cats  
and tips for weight loss**

Approximately 40% of pets in the UK are either overweight or obese. Obesity is an important medical disease because it may predispose to a variety of other disorders such as osteoarthritis, diabetes mellitus, constipation, reduced life expectancy and increased anaesthetic risks. For these reasons it is a welfare concern and the main aims of weight management are to improve quality of life and reduce risks of associated diseases.

### **How can I tell if my pet is obese?**

It is often very difficult for us to see that our own pet is overweight as the weight gain is so gradual. When you are stroking your cat or dog next, run your hand gently over their backbone and ribs. In a healthy, normal dog or cat you should be able to feel the bones with light pressure. If you cannot feel the backbone easily, your animal is overweight. A sagging abdominal fat pad may be present in cats.

### **My pet hardly eats anything - how can it be fat?**

Many overweight animals do not eat very much - it doesn't take many calories to keep an animal fat. If your animal is overweight that means that they were eating more than they needed at some time in their life. Often obese pets take very little exercise so don't use up much energy and require very few calories, so it is easy to over supplement.

### **Problems associated with obesity**

There is evidence to show that overweight animals have a **shorter lifespan** compared to those fed a calorie-restricted diet.

They suffer **increased risks during anaesthesia and surgery** due to variable effects of medications, increased resistance when breathing under anaesthetic and fat reducing visibility of organs and structures during operations.

There are also many diseases associated with obesity:

**Diabetes mellitus and insulin resistance:** Cats most often suffer with “insulin resistant” forms of diabetes and weight loss in cats reduces the amount of insulin required for treatment, sometimes stopping the need for it entirely. There are no clear studies which show a link between obesity and diabetes mellitus in dogs, but it may be related to pancreatitis and certainly reduced bodyweight helps to control diabetes better by increasing insulin sensitivity.

**Orthopaedic disease:** In dogs, obesity is a major risk factor for traumatic disease (e.g. cranial cruciate ligament rupture) as well as degenerative diseases (e.g. osteoarthritis). Weight reduction can lead to marked improvement of lameness in dogs with hip arthritis, by either reducing loading on the painful joint or reducing progression, although the exact mechanism is not known.

Some studies in cats have shown increased lameness in obese cats, but orthopaedic disease in cats is under-recognised and may only appear as reduced ability to jump.

**Cardiorespiratory disease:** In overweight dogs there is a reduced functional lung volume and obesity is associated with upper airway conditions such as tracheal collapse. It also predisposes to hypertension, blood clots and reduced oxygen supply to the heart.

**Neoplasia (Tumours):** Some studies in both dogs and cats have shown an increased risk of tumours in obese animals. Transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder is much more common in overweight dogs.

**Urinary tract disease:** There are links with incontinence and some bladder stones in overweight dogs. Overweight cats are more likely to get cystitis.

## **How can I help my pet lose weight?**

*Sign up with a nurse for free weight clinics to tailor weight loss strategies for your pet, as well as regular weigh ins to keep you and your pet motivated!*

There are only two ways to lose weight:

- Reduce number of calories consumed - eat less food
- Increase the amount of energy used - take more exercise

In most cases, reducing dietary intake to two-thirds of what your pet was eating should permit steady weight loss. Weight loss should be gradual over 3-4 months. **Rapid weight loss in cats is dangerous as this can cause liver disease.**

Taking your dog for regular walks (even if the weather is not very pleasant) will help. It can be difficult to get cats to exercise, but encouraging them to go outside when the weather is good or engaging in play can be helpful.

Here are some more tips:

- Get everyone at home on board!
- Weigh food instead of measuring it out in a cup.
- Split the food into at least two meals a day, just one feed makes animals hungrier for the next one.
- Give normal food as treats, taken out of the food allowance for the day.
- Offer fresh water instead of milk for cats.
- Some dogs will enjoy eating raw or boiled vegetables such as carrots to bulk up the main meal.
- Make your pet work for their food, either through play, training or using activity feeders while you are out.
- Cats that go out and either hunt or visit neighbours to be fed may need to be kept indoors or have a message attached to the collar asking other people not to feed them.

## Prescription diets for weight loss

Simply reducing food intake can be difficult as your animal will be hungry so it is tempting to give in and offer a treat! If all the above fails, it may be time to try a special prescription diet for weight loss, such as Hill's r/d. This has added ingredients to make your pet feel more full as well as burn calories more efficiently.

It is usually possible for an animal to lose weight on a prescription diet then return to normal food, however some animals seem to have a tendency to put on weight and may need to stay on calorie-restricted diets for life.

## My pet has reached their target weight - now what?

Once your pet has reached her target weight a celebration is called for. Congratulations!

However, this is not the end of the road - rather the beginning of a new life. Just as in people it is common for an obese animal to regain all the weight that has been lost if it returns to its previous diet.

**Maintaining a normal bodyweight is an important part of keeping your pet healthy. If you are in any doubt about your pet's weight, talk to a vet or nurse today**



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