



Weight Management for Your Pet

The “excess baggage” that our animals may carry can be a very important factor affecting long-term health. Extra weight can be a burden to an animal with sore joints and it may lead to health problems later on such as diabetes.

Although, as with humans, the scale is not completely accurate to determine the absolute condition of an animal because muscle weighs more than fat, it is generally a useful indicator of progress. Another useful tool is to view your animal from above and if they have their chest tapering into a waist (as opposed to a barrel like appearance!) and their ribs are easy to feel under their skin, but cannot be seen, then your animal is in good condition.

Occasionally animals might have health conditions that may make it difficult for them to lose weight such as thyroid disease or too much cortisol in their system, due to either a malfunction of their adrenal gland or from medication. In these cases we may use further diagnostics such as blood tests and apply various medications to support their health.

Generally there are a few fundamental guidelines to follow that help to make weight management easy. The more of these simple guidelines that are used, the greater the progress that may be expected, however even making use of just some of these daily habits should help to make a difference.

Firstly, the quality of food fed is imperative to helping the body use food efficiently. Poor quality food is difficult for the body to use. The body can be starved of important nutrients and it tends to store what it gets as fat. Ideally use a raw food diet as previously discussed. Premium pet food biscuits may also be fed but they are generally deficient in optimal amounts of critical nutrients such as the omega fatty acids and more research is indicating that chemicals and preservatives may be detrimental to long-term health.

The amount of food fed is the next critical step in helping to regulate a healthy weight. Feeding too much food will cause the excess to be stored as fat. If your pet isn't losing weight after 2 weeks on a set protocol then you will need to cut down further on the amount that he/she's being fed.

The frequency and timing of meals also has an impact on weight. Feeding only once a day teaches the body that it needs to store fat so that it can use it for energy when there's no food. It also slows the metabolism down. Rather feed 2-3 smaller meals a day rather than one big 1. Large meals fed at night lead the body to store fat as the metabolism slows when sleeping. Rather feed larger meals in the morning and visa versa in the case where your cat is more active at night.

Limit snacks and treats, especially where they are unhealthy foods such as cake. They provide extra calories which is stored as fat. Rather give a small treat instead of a whole biscuit; your pet will enjoy it just as much. Feed a large raw or rawhide bone or a pigs ear for your pet to chew on, or add extra vegetables or wholegrain rice if you need to bulk their food up as these are high in fibre and won't easily be stored as fat.

Omega 3 fatty acids are extremely helpful to aid the body in burning excess. Supplementing your animal's diet with this wonderful nutrient found in high concentrations in flax oil and fish oil will make a tremendous difference not only to their weight, but to their overall health.

Finally, exercise is an extremely valuable tool to assist body burn excess fat. Always start off with a gentle walk (500m) in unfit and obese animals and gradually build up over several weeks to a few kilometres.

Ideally implement these changes gradually over a 2 week period. Also bear in mind that cats may be very difficult to manage as they can be very picky eaters and if you're not feeding what they want they often go and visit the neighbor! Overall however, the effort is worthwhile to add quality to your animal's life.