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Obesity and Your Pet

An estimated 93 million cats and dogs are considered overweight or obese. That is over half the pet population. It is very important to maintain your pet within a healthy weight range because there are many health risks associated with obesity, such as arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and a decreased life expectancy.

How can I tell if my pet is overweight?

There are several criteria that can be used to determine if your pet is overweight. An animal with a healthy weight will have ribs that are easily felt, a tucked abdomen(no sagging), and a waist that can be seen when looking down at your pets back. An animal that is overweight will have a sagging stomach, a broad and flat back, no waist, and ribs that are difficult to feel. A veterinarian may also evaluate your pets weight and assign him or her a body condition score(BCS). A BSC of 1-3 is too thin, 4-5 is ideal, and 6-9 is overweight or obese.

My pet doesn't eat that much!?!? You may be surprised

Helping your pet lose weight will take discipline just as if you were going to start a new diet plan. There are two important aspects to losing weight; diet and exercise. The first step is to determine how much your pet is eating. If offering food free choice, you will need to start meal feeding. This means your pet is fed a measured amount of food one or two times daily. An actual measuring cup should be used to determine the volume of food being fed daily. Once the amount of food being fed is determined, decrease that volume by 25%. For example, if your pet was eating 2 cups of food a day it will now be given 1 ½ cups a day. Also, pay close attention to treats and table scraps as these are very high in calories. There are several low calorie treat options: vegetables(carrots, green beans, broccoli), Cheerios, and air popped popcorn.

Time to Sweat

Exercising your pet is an important part of losing weight and also a great way to bond with your pet and get some exercise yourself. Start with just a few minutes several times a day and then gradually increase over time. Too much in the beginning may result in injury to your pet. A few great ways to burn calories are a walk around the block, playing catch in the backyard, or a swim at local pond if permitted.

Step on the Scale

Monitor your pets weight on a regular basis. If the animal begins to lose too much weight you may have to start feeding it more. On the other hand, if the animal does not lose any weight you should schedule an appointment with your veterinarian. It may have an underlying medical condition, such as an under active thyroid, that keeps it from losing weight. Medications or a special diet may be prescribed.