



Canine Obesity

Nutritional Guidelines for Overweight Dogs

Overweight conditions are common in dogs. Studies suggest that over 30 percent of dogs examined at veterinary clinics are overweight, with a higher incidence reported in dogs who are older than five years of age. If your dog is overweight, healthy weight loss and management can improve his health, well-being and quality of life

WHAT CAUSES OBESITY IN DOGS?

Dogs become overweight in response to a basic energy imbalance; energy (calorie) intake exceeds energy expenditure. If this imbalance persists for weeks or months, the dog stores the excess energy primarily as body fat and weight gain results. Today, the two most important contributors to obesity in dogs are inactivity and excess caloric intake:

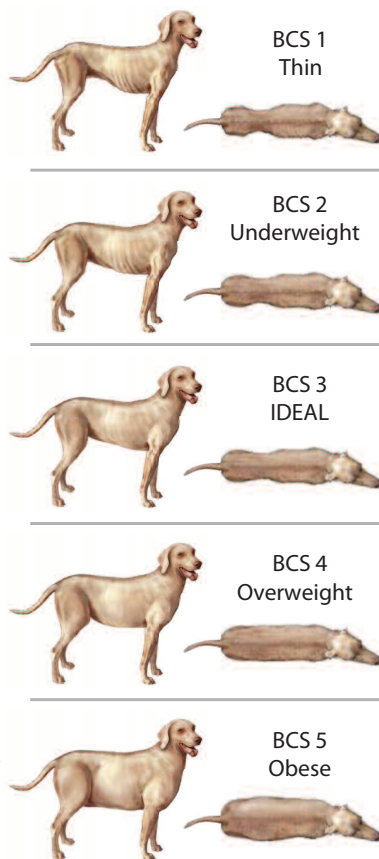
- ✓ **Inadequate activity/exercise:** Because most dogs live as companions and house pets rather than as working partners, many lead a relatively sedentary lifestyle. In addition, as a dog gains weight, exercise becomes more difficult and less enjoyable, leading to further reductions in voluntary activity and additional weight gain – and a vicious cycle develops.
- ✓ **Excess caloric intake:** The persistent consumption of excess calories can occur from over-feeding a balanced dog food, feeding a food that is more energy dense than the dog requires, or feeding too many treats or table scraps. Keeping food available to your dog at all times and allowing self-feeding can also lead to over-eating.
- ✓ **Other factors:** The underlying energy equation that determines weight gain, loss, or stability is always

one of energy in vs. energy out. However there are several additional factors that can influence a dog's energy intake or expenditure and thus his or her susceptibility to weight gain. These factors include:

Age - Older dogs are less active and require less food than younger animals.

Reproductive status - Although neutering does not directly cause weight gain, neutered males and females generally have slightly reduced energy needs and lower activity levels than intact dogs.

Breed and temperament – Some dog breeds are, by nature, calmer and more sedentary than others. For example, a 45-lb Border Collie is generally more energetic than a Bulldog of similar weight. Individual animals also vary considerably in body type and activity level, which can affect daily calorie needs and susceptibility to over- or under-weight conditions.



IS YOUR DOG OVERWEIGHT?

Dogs who weigh more than ideal body weight by 10 to 20 percent are considered overweight, while dogs who weigh 20 percent or more than ideal body weight are classified as obese. For example, a Spaniel-mix whose ideal weight is 30 lbs. is classified as overweight if he weighs 35 lbs. and obese if he weighs 38 lbs.

Unfortunately, overweight conditions in dogs are frequently unrecognized by pet owners. This is not surprising because weight gain is gradual, taking place over many months or years.





Because overweight conditions can be difficult for pet owners to recognize, nutritionists and veterinarians have created body condition charts to assist in determining if your dog is above or below her healthiest weight. Knowing your dog's ideal adult body weight and learning how to assess body condition can help you to keep your dog in optimal body condition throughout life.

DEVELOPING A WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM FOR YOUR DOG

A visit to your veterinarian is essential before starting a weight loss program for your dog. Your veterinarian can evaluate your dog's weight and body condition and will also examine him for any complicating health conditions. Dogs who are more than 10 percent overweight should be fed a food that has been specifically formulated for weight loss or for weight control. These foods contain reduced fat and fewer calories per cup than adult maintenance foods and are specially formulated to ensure that dogs receive all of the essential nutrients while consuming fewer calories per day. The food should include high quality protein to support lean body mass during weight loss and normal (not increased) levels of dietary fiber. Feeding a diet that contains carbohydrates from sorghum and barley can help to manage blood glucose and insulin levels, which is beneficial for overweight dogs. Look also for l-carnitine, a vitamin-like compound that promotes the body's use of dietary fat for energy which can aid in weight loss. The inclusion of omega-3 fatty acids and an adjusted omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acid ratio will help to support skin and coat health during weight loss. Iams® and Eukanuba® offer several weight control products for dogs that include all of these features. Alternatively, your veterinarian may recommend a veterinary weight loss food such as an Iams Veterinary Formula™ product that is designed for weight loss.



An effective and safe goal for weight loss in most dogs is approximately 1 to 2 % of the dog's current weight per week. Here are a few additional tips to help:

- Monitor intake and weight regularly. Provide pre-measured meals and closely monitor your dog's daily intake. Evaluate your dog's weight weekly, and adjust the amount of food that is fed as needed to maintain a safe rate of weight loss.
- Increase daily exercise: Regular exercise improves fitness and health, increases daily energy expenditure, helps to regulate appetite, and promotes lean tissue (muscle) retention during weight loss. Identify activities that you and your dog both enjoy. Daily walks in a park or neighborhood are one of the best ways for dogs to exercise because walking also provides socialization and mental stimulation. Other activities that are excellent forms of exercise for dogs include retrieving, swimming, playing Frisbee® and learning a new canine sport such as fly ball, agility or Rally-O.
- Account for or reduce treats/biscuits: If you use treats or biscuits during training or as an extra indulgence just to show your dog that you love him, remember to reduce his food slightly on days with training sessions or reduce the number or size of treats that you are providing.
- Avoid feeding table scraps and food from the table. Eliminating table scraps may be sufficient to achieve the desired weight reduction in some dogs who are just slightly overweight. Keep your dog away from areas where food is prepared and served to avoid giving too many "extras" and train your dog not to beg for table scraps.

KEEPING THE WEIGHT OFF

Success! Your dog has lost weight, is enjoying the increased exercise, and feels great! Now, your only challenge is to keep the weight off. The most important guideline for maintaining your dog's optimal body weight is to feed to meet but not exceed energy needs and closely monitor your dog's body weight throughout life. This is accomplished by selecting a food based upon your dog's age, life stage, and activity level. Once a food is selected, feed a pre-measured amount that supports optimal body condition. Adjust the amount of food that is fed each day to best fit your dog's current energy needs and activity level.