

## CRITTER CHATTER-Is My Pet Obese???

We have all seen the Chihuahua that resembles a marshmallow with peg legs. It may belong to the other person waiting in the lobby at the vet office, to a family member or friend, or may even be your own beloved pet. Obesity is the most common nutritional disease amongst pets, and is defined as an excess increase in body weight beyond the body's skeletal and physical capacity. Obesity is prevalent in today's human and pet population, and is caused by many contributing factors.

Excess fat tissue causes inflammation in many areas of the body. If left untreated, obesity can lead to many health conditions such as diabetes, bone and joint problems, back pain, breathing issues, skin disorders, intestinal disorders, constipation, and others. Due to the multiple health conditions associated with obesity, most obese pets do not live as long as if they were a normal weight.

Lack of daily activity has led to the sedentary lifestyle of our beloved pets. It is all too common for Fido or Whiskers to hold down the couch throughout the day, waiting for mom or dad to come home. Greetings typically last for a few minutes, after which Fido or Whiskers resume their position on the couch. This sedentary lifestyle is a huge contributor for obesity. All pets require exercise or activity of some sort every day.

Dogs can be taken on a brisk walk morning and night, or can engage in an interactive game of fetch, tennis ball, hide and seek, laser light, tug of war, or keep away with the owner or family two or three times a day. In addition, there are many puzzle toys on the market which dispense one kibble or treat at a time as the pet plays with the toy, or which make finding kibble or treats a challenging game.

Outdoor cats often get a good deal of exercise stalking prey, climbing trees, and well, being a cat. However, this is can be a challenge for indoor cats. Engaging indoor cats with a game of laser light or playing with items such as toy mice, fishing pole toys, or other such toys can help keep indoor cats active. Many indoor cats also enjoy cat towers or catios which provide them with opportunities to stalk, play, run, and climb. Cat tunnels can be made out of paper bags with the bottoms cut out and taped together, and homemade toys can be made from old toilet paper rolls with the ends taped and holes cut in the cardboard roll just big enough for a treat or kibble to fall out while the cat bats the toy back and forth. Feeding pods are also available in which the cat's food is placed into pods and is distributed once the cat pounces and releases the kibble.

Diet is the other major factor that contributes to obesity. Each pet food has its own nutritional and calorie content. Once you determine the optimal weight for your pet, you can feed the recommended amount of food each day (the recommended daily amount for the pet's optimal weight is typically somewhere on the package). Keep in mind that each treat, tidbit of human food, rawhide chew, etc. has its own calories that contribute to your pet's overall caloric intake. Changing from treats such as Beggin Strips or Pupperonis to apple slices (no seeds), carrots, celery, blueberries, etc. is also a great way to decrease daily calories. Beware of grapes, raisins, garlic, and onions as these can be toxic to pets.

A decrease in metabolic needs is often seen in spayed or neutered pets, therefore their food intake often needs to be decreased once they have been surgically spayed or neutered.

Over the counter weight loss diets are available, which typically have increased fiber content to make the pet feel fuller and eat less. These are typically labeled and sold as healthy weight formulas, light formulas, reduced calorie formulas and so on. Prescription diets are also available through your veterinarian for weight reduction and weight management.

Certain medical conditions can lead to a pet being overweight or obese. Low thyroid levels in dogs can lead to the pet being overweight or difficulty losing weight. Other common symptoms are dry or brittle hair coat, hair loss (often symmetrical), lethargy, and sad expression. Other endocrine diseases or certain medications can increase appetite, and lead to obesity.

This year take back your pet's weight and help them to live a longer and healthier life. Partner with your veterinarian to discuss recommendations and ways to help get your pet's weight back on track... Fido and Whiskers will be glad you did.