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OBESITY IN PETS

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Just as human physicians are constantly nagging us about our weight, so too are veterinarians constantly nagging pet owners about their pet's weight. Obesity is the most common nutritional disorder we see. Nutritionists tell us that obesity is defined as being at least 15% above one's optimum body weight. Elderly pets and female pets are more likely to be overweight, but because we control how much our pet is fed, it is ultimately up to us if our pet is overweight. An estimated incidence of obesity in dogs and cats is about 40%. Simply put, obesity is an imbalance between the calories consumed and the calories burned.

You can assess your dog or cat's level of fitness by feel. Placing your hands on each side of the chest, your pet is thin to normal if the ribs are easily felt, overweight if the ribs are difficult to feel and grossly overweight if you cannot feel the ribs at all. If your pet is obese, you can expect them to have an increased incidence of physical ailments and a shorter life span. Obesity is known to cause, worsen or increase the incidence of cancer, arthritis or degenerative joint disease, spinal disc disease, ligament rupture, lung and respiratory disease, heart disease, liver disease, skin disease, diabetes, constipation, excessive gas, pancreatitis, heat intolerance, surgery and anesthetic risk, mental irritability associated with discomfort and susceptibility to infection. A study done by the University of Pennsylvania and Nestle-Purina showed that dogs fed a calorie restricted diet lived a median 1.8 years longer than dogs allowed to eat more and are slower to develop chronic diseases such as osteoarthritis.

Following a weight control program designed by your veterinarian will improve your pet's appearance, health and enjoyment of life and decrease your future veterinary bills. Before beginning a weight loss program, a veterinary exam should be performed to rule out conditions that can resemble weight gain, such as diabetes and congestive heart

failure. Your veterinarian can also assist you in setting a goal weight and in establishing a plan. A reasonable rate for weight loss in your pet is 3% per week.

To assist you in a successful weight reduction program for your pet, here are a few management tips:

1. Reduce your pet's calorie intake by feeding a low calorie, high fiber food specially formulated to reduce weight.
2. Keep your pet out of the room when food is being prepared or eaten.
3. Don't feed obese pets with other pets.
4. Don't feed anything other than the amount of food prescribed by our veterinarian
5. Exercise your pet regularly as directed.
6. Once every week, weigh your pet and record its weight. Most veterinary clinics are happy to have you use their scale and will assist you in keeping a record and making any necessary adjustments.
7. To prevent the weight from coming back, weigh your pet regularly, noting any fluctuations and adjusting the amount fed if necessary.

This is a perfect case of killing your pet with kindness. Pets can be very adept at convincing us to give them a treat. But too many treats too often can be very detrimental to our best friend. If you need help, veterinarians have lots of tools and resources to help you be effective at getting the extra pound off of your pets back.