

## **OBESITY IN PETS**

Obesity in pets is probably the most common health problem encountered by veterinarians. Most pet owners start out with good intentions, but soon slip into the habit of offering tidbits from their plate and or treats. Most pet owners don't realize that these are extremely high in calories and 1 Milk-Bone may have more calories than the entire meal of pet food. Pet treats, just like Hershey Bars, are very palatable so the animals eat them in spite of being full.

Lack of exercise also contributes to excess weight gain. We have less time to exercise and hence we exercise our pets less too.

Neutering our pets has many advantages for their overall health, however it also slows down their metabolism so not adjusting the caloric intake or not maintaining their exercise can contribute to weight problems in spayed or castrated animals.

Reputable pet food companies spend a lot of time and money to produce a balanced diet for your pet. Feeding table food and treats unbalances those diets. They can also teach poor eating habits that may preclude dietary changes in the future that may be essential to control a health problem. Examples would be kidney disease or conditions like diabetes that require strict diets for successful treatment.

Also remember that not eating large quantities of a food does not mean your pet does not like that food. It may be meeting its caloric requirements with a smaller quantity, better quality pet food will be more caloric dense. If your pet is overweight eating less is better anyway.

Obesity leads to many detrimental problems in pets. One of the most common is joint degeneration (arthritis) as they age. Excess weight causes undue stress on joint tendons and cartilage.

You should be able to easily feel your pets backbone and ribs when you rub over their body. If you can't they are probably over weight. Ask your veterinarian to help you determine the right body condition for you pet, remember they should be your advisor in health matters, not the grocery store clerk or the groomer. There are several new products available to help in weight matters one of which is Prescription Diet M/D, which is the Adkin's diet for cats. We have used it on a limited basis in our practice but feel like it has made a difference in those cases.

In conclusion, feeding treats and table food is a learned process. Your pet has probably trained you to feed these things by not eating pet food and holding out for treats. You also feel like you are expressing your affection for your pet by giving them special food. In actuality, you may be contributing to their obesity and creating health problems. Praise and petting is a better reward for good behavior than food. Pets will not expect high calorie treats if you don't teach them to expect them. Are you providing these items for their best interest or for you?

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