

This Month: Weight Management

Weight Management

It's a new year and time for new resolutions to live healthier and happier, and what better way to get fit than to take your favorite dog for a jog around the neighborhood? After all, animals need to stay fit too.

It has been estimated that up to 40% of America's pet population is overweight, and unfortunately for our pets most of us don't realize it. Lean, lithe pets are often seen as underweight, while slightly obese pets are now thought of as healthy-looking. But a 10lb dog or cat that has gained only two pounds is the equivalent to a human gaining thirty! If a human lost thirty extra pounds he or she would probably feel a lot healthier and happier in general, so imagine what those two pounds can do for your kitty or chihuahua. And imagine how much better your lab will feel at 70lbs rather than 90lbs!

Not only will your pet feel better trimmer, but they will also be at less risk for heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, and fatty liver disease, among other problems. Shedding a few pounds can decrease the risk of all of these problems and increase the lifespan of your furry friend.

So, if our views of "healthy-looking" pets are skewed, how can we tell if our pet is overweight? Rib palpation is the key to this question. Rub your fingers over your pet's ribs on either side; if you can easily feel the ribs under the skin and a thin fat layer your pet is the ideal size. If, however, you cannot easily feel your pet's ribs, or can feel them through a thick layer of fat your pet is overweight. You can also do a quick check by looking straight down at them from above – if you can see a defined "waist" on your pet it is probably a healthy size. The same goes for the belly of your animal: if there is no defined abdominal tuck between your animal's ribs and hips it is probably overweight. (See the visual aides provided at the end of this newsletter for additional guidance.) Pets with a weight problem also tend to have trouble getting up from a laying position, tire easily when exercising, and therefore, show reluctance to any form of exercise. If this sounds like your furry friend they might be a little overweight.

The following are accepted average weights for a few common pure breeds. Keep in mind that proper weight management must take into account the sex, bone structure, and overall size of the animal in question.

Chihuahua: 4lbs
Most Cats: 9lbs
Cocker Spaniel: 25lbs
Beagle: 30lbs

Pointer: 65lbs
Golden Retriever: 70lbs
Great Dane: 130lbs

If you think your pet might be overweight the first step is to bring it to the veterinarian for a checkup. Because certain serious diseases such as Hyperthyroidism, Cushing's disease, and a decreased drive to exercise from other medical problems can cause obesity in pets a visit to the vet is required to rule out these causes. If a physical exam, thorough medical history and appropriate laboratory tests come back negative, it is probably safe to assume that too much food and too little exercise might be the culprit. A diet should be initiated. (See the tips below!). Many times it's simply a case of high-calorie between-meal snacks being given by every family member. If this is the case, **all** family members must refrain from giving treats between meals – one sympathetic treat-sneaker could be the downfall of an otherwise successful diet.

Other culprits may be poorly formulated diets. Although utilitarian diets meet the minimum standards set by the USDA, they often contain dyes, preservatives, carbohydrates and fats but may lack micro-nutrients or the proper ratios of protein for healthy animals. When fed these diets, pets may eat more per meal in an effort to make up for the nutrients they aren't getting per bite, thus gaining unhealthy weight. High carbohydrate diets (corn based diets) lead to quick spikes in blood glucose that rapidly dissipate, leaving the overweight animal to seek more food to offset the glucose 'crash'. Switching to a premium or super-premium brand of food (like Eagle Pack brand foods) can help your pet not only by cutting down on the unneeded filler products, but also by providing the appropriate nutrients, so that your pet doesn't feel the need to eat more to get what it needs from the food. We have seen several examples of overweight, diabetic cats responding to higher protein, lower carbohydrate diets, such as Purina's DM diet or Hill's Prescription m/d diet. Both of these diets target the protein/carbohydrate imbalances that are especially important to cats. (See our 'success story' of the month at the bottom of this newsletter!).

Lastly, feeding habits should be changed if you find your pet is overweight. If you are free-feeding your pet (leaving food out all day so they can eat at their leisure) you may want to consider feeding actual meals. The official veterinary recommendation for feeding our pet carnivores (barring any special medical needs) is once-a-day feedings. Cat owners may find this idea particularly distressing, because they know that their cat will harass them as long as the bowl is empty. Take a deep breath and see our diet tips for additional help in this department. If you insist on between-meal treats, make them as healthy (and small) as possible; baby red potatoes, baby carrots and peas all make wonderful, healthy snacks and will also help prevent food allergies in your dog (see the September issue of the Newsletter for more information on food allergies). Foods and treats that are packaged and marketed like human snacks (like "Snausages") will be the least healthy for your pets because, just like human snacks, they have high amounts of dyes, preservatives, fats and sugars.

In addition to changing the feeding habits and food sources of your pet, exercise is needed to trim down the extra weight. But that doesn't mean you should suddenly take your chubby friend out for a 5k sprint! Just like humans, pets need to ease into an exercise routine. With help from your veterinarian, and taking into account the age, breed, and physical fitness of your pet, you can create an easy-to-maintain routine to help your pet slowly get to its ideal weight. Always keep plenty of fresh water handy for both you and your furry friend while working out, and keep in mind what the conditions are like outside. While humans can throw on thick shoes and coats, or can change into shorts

and t-shirts, animals always have the same wardrobe and exercising in very hot or cold weather can do more harm than good. Always wait two hours after a meal to begin exercising, and start with slower, shorter workouts and build up to longer, harder workouts. You should also weigh your pet every two weeks to keep track of their weight-loss, and expect to see results within 4-8 weeks.

Cat Trim Tips:

Feed only what they will eat for fifteen minutes.

Initially, put away the food bowl *every* time you leave your home - cats eat when they're bored.

Feed cats when you arrive home (so they won't 'bug' you).

Try to delay the feedings little by little each time you come home. Gradually increase the time the food is *not* on the ground until you achieve the fifteen minute rule.

Exercise with a laser pointer toy (it won't roll under the furniture and get lost, it is very easy to do, and it's FUN!) 'Cat Dancers' work well, too, for the same reasons.

Do Not 'crash diet' an overweight cat; it could develop fatty liver disease.

If the dieting cat suddenly and unexpectedly loses its appetite, seek veterinary care immediately.

Healthy treats for cats might include boiled green peas, diced cantaloupe, or *small amounts* of minced chicken breast. Offer the peas and cantaloupe first - you might be surprised!

Dog Trim Tips:

Determine the total daily volume of food currently fed by measuring it with a kitchen measuring cup, then decrease the total volume by one third and feed this volume for two weeks.

Exercise on the beach (observe leash laws, local codes, restricted summer hours, etc.) or at the new James Island County Dog Park, for best results. Even walking is better than lying around the house or yard. If no weight loss occurs, decrease the *NEW* food volume by one third, and try again. Continue exercising.

Healthy treats for dogs might include carrots, green peas (frozen), cantaloupe, broccoli, canned pumpkin, or other veggies. Chop and freeze them for convenient snacks. Some of these can be added to the food to increase satiation.

If no weight loss occurs, be sure to contact your vet before continuing the diet.

Once a healthy weight is achieved (your vet can help you with a target weight), increase the ration midway between the current and last volume fed. Do not return to the original ration that led to the weight problem in the first place!

Osteochondritis Dissecans

Another concern with rapid weight gain in puppies is osteochondritis dissecans, or OCD. OCD is a disease usually found in larger breed puppies where the cartilage in the joints of the legs grows too quickly and begins to crack or fold up on itself. The extra cartilage can break off or scrape against the joint, causing inflammation, pain, lameness, and even degenerative joint disease. Many dogs with OCD will refuse to move because of the pain associated with the action, and most of them will show swelling around the joints in their legs. However, some dogs will be able to run and jump without obvious discomfort, only showing signs of pain after exercise. Some believe that feeding a diet lower in protein than most commercial puppy foods will help these large breed dogs to have a decreased chance of developing OCD. It is suggested that large breed puppies (Great Danes, Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Retrievers and Weimaraners) be fed a dog food with less than 25% protein in it, such as a large breed puppy food or even adult dog food, to protect the dog from developing painful OCD.

Success Story: Gypsy!

Gypsy, a 13 year old, neutered male, domestic short-hair cat, had not been doing well for several years before he came to the FRAH in Sept 2004. He wasn't acting normal, seemed to be constipated, had poor fur quality and other vague signs. A physical exam and blood work were performed. The physical demonstrated neurologic deficits and an overall, unthrifty physical condition. The blood work showed a very high glucose with some other enzyme elevations. Serial blood glucose measurements confirmed that this was a consistent problem. Diabetes mellitus was diagnosed and 'Gypsy' was started on insulin therapy. Very quickly, "Gypsy" improved dramatically. He began to act like a normal cat, eat more regularly, and his constipation improved. Gypsy's owner lived in Florida, so Gypsy left the FRAH to continue care and insulin therapy with his regular vet for the next few months. Gypsy returned in December because his owner was distraught. After a sudden reversal in Gypsy's improvement, his regular vet was worried that Gypsy might have cancer. Back at the FRAH, Gypsy was re-evaluated and a urinalysis confirmed a bacterial bladder infection. No evidence for cancer was found on physical exam nor bloodwork. Insulin was continued, antibiotics were started and Gypsy was placed on a special diet (Purina DM) to help control his diabetes. Gypsy began to slowly improve again, and he and his owner returned to Florida. Back home, Gypsy's regular vet discontinued the insulin therapy and stopped the DM diet! Gypsy got another urinary tract infection, became blocked (could not urinate), and was placed on more antibiotics. He came back to the FRAH for more help! Gypsy was put back on the DM diet, maintained on antibiotics, and his blood glucose was carefully monitored. For 7 months now, Gypsy has been eating Purina DM, off insulin and other medicines, free from disease, and back to his old self again!

Dates, Upcoming News, Specials:

Want to start your dog on a healthy diet but afraid of the cost? Log onto www.eaglepack.com and print out a coupon for a bag of their dog or cat foods.

January is "Adopt a Rescue Bird" month, and January 22nd is "answer your cat's question" day.

Dental Health month is February! Call now to schedule your dog or cat's dental during the month of February and receive 20% off the procedure.











Fall and spring's milder weather is the perfect breeding ground for ticks. If your dog gets a tick, buy some tick tweezers to safely remove the entire tick (including the head) and make sure to keep your dog well protected with Frontline or Preventic collars.

Want to get a head start on next year's flea season? Keeping your pet on Frontline or Revolution throughout the winter months will insure that they will be flea-free come next spring! Doing the same for heartworm prevention will insure that your favorite furry friend is heartworm negative all year long too!

Did you miss last month's newsletter? Don't worry! The FRAH Newsletter is now on the web! www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm

The FRAH website had also gone through a change recently, with new sections and information being added every week! Check out the new 'Homecare' section for advice on everything from behavior modification to wound care, to brushing teeth at home. www.follyroadanimalhospital.com

Body Condition Scores

1	<p>VERY THIN</p> <p>Ribs: Easily felt with no fat cover Tail Base: Bones are raised with no tissue between the skin and bone Side View: Severe abdominal tuck Overhead View: Accentuated hourglass shape</p>	 	 
2	<p>UNDERWEIGHT</p> <p>Ribs: Easily felt with no fat cover Tail Base: Bones are raised with no tissue between the skin and bone Side View: Abdominal tuck Overhead View: Marked hourglass shape</p>	 	 
3	<p>NORMAL WEIGHT</p> <p>Ribs: Easily felt with slight fat cover Tail Base: Smooth contour but bones can be felt under a thin layer of fat Side View: Abdominal tuck Overhead View: Well-proportioned lumbar waist</p>	 	 
4	<p>OVERWEIGHT</p> <p>Ribs: Difficult to feel with moderate fat cover Tail Base: Some thickening but bones can be felt under a moderate layer of fat Side View: No abdominal tuck or waist Overhead View: Back is slightly broadened</p>	 	 
5	<p>OBESE</p> <p>Ribs: Difficult to feel with thick fat cover Tail Base: Thickened and difficult to feel under a prominent layer of fat Side View: Fat hangs from the abdomen and there is no waist Overhead View: Markedly broadened</p>	 	 

(Courtesy Hill's Pet Nutrition: www.hillspet.com)