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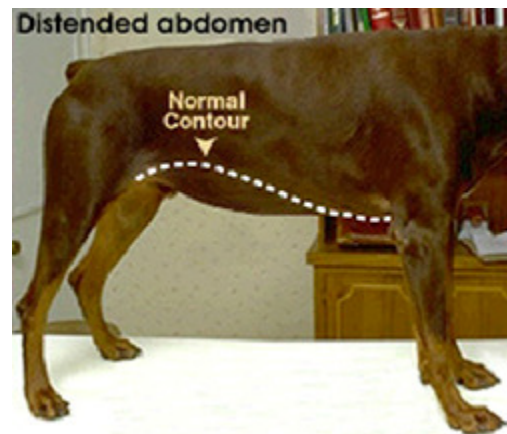
## Weight Reduction in Dogs

Weight loss is tough for anyone - two- or four-legged! However, losing weight and getting in shape can add not only years to your dog's life, it can also make those extra years more enjoyable. Helping your cuddly canine to shed a few pounds may be easier than you think. It simply requires a commitment to weight loss and fitness, attention to details and the assistance of your veterinary healthcare team.

### Why should my dog lose weight?

"As few as five pounds above the ideal body weight can put your dog at risk for developing some serious medical conditions."

As few as five pounds above the ideal body weight can put your dog at risk for developing some serious medical conditions. Unfortunately, when a dog is overweight or obese it no longer is a question of "if" your dog will develop a condition secondary to the excess weight but "how soon and how serious!" Some of the common disorders associated with excess weight include:



- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Osteoarthritis (arthritis)
- Increased frequency of joint injuries
- High blood pressure
- Some forms of cancer - especially intra-abdominal cancers

Overweight and obese dogs usually have shorter lives than their fitter, normal weight counterparts. Heavy dogs tend to physically interact less with their families and are less energetic and playful. Because they tend to lie around more, it is easier to overlook early signs of illness, since we may attribute their lethargy to their "normal laziness." We are just now learning how serious and threatening a few extra pounds can be for both humans and our critter companions.

## **How should I begin a weight loss program for my dog?**

"Fewer calories in plus more calories out equals weight loss."

Theoretically, weight loss seems simple enough: fewer calories in plus more calories out equals weight loss. Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. You should never put your dog on a diet without the assistance of your veterinary healthcare team. There may be an underlying medical condition that is causing or contributing to your dog's excess weight. Some common diseases associated with weight gain include hypothyroidism and hyperadrenocorticism (Cushing's disease). These diseases, along with others, should be eliminated as possible causes or contributors to your dog's weight problem prior to beginning a diet. Too many dogs start on a diet and fail to lose weight simply because the diet wasn't the problem - a disease was. Your veterinarian will perform a physical examination and recommend blood tests to ensure that there are no obstacles to weight loss for your pet.

## **How much should I feed my dog to promote weight loss?**

In order to answer this question, your veterinarian will need to calculate your dog's ideal weight based on its breed and size. Based on your dog's degree of excess weight, your veterinarian may recommend a target weight higher than the ideal weight to start. After the dog loses this weight, a re-evaluation will be made to determine whether further weight loss is needed. A safe weight loss for most dogs is 3-5% body weight loss per month.

There are formulas and charts that can be used to calculate exactly how many calories your dog requires to maintain its body weight, and how many calories it needs to achieve its ideal body weight. A basic formula for weight loss in dogs is:

- $[70 \times (\text{ideal weight in kg})]^{3/4}$  or  $[70 \times (\text{ideal weight in kg})]$  to the  $3/4$  power

or

- $\text{RER in kcal/day} = 30(\text{body weight in kilograms}) + 70$

To save you making the calculations, the following chart provides calorie requirements based on weight ranges, as follows:

Ideal weight (lbs)	Calories to feed (kcal) at 100% RER per day	Ideal weight (lbs)	Calories to feed (kcal) at 100% RER per day
10	210	55	820
15	270	60	890
20	340	65	950
25	410	70	1020
30	480	75	1090
35	550	80	1160
40	615	85	1230
45	680	90	1300
50	750	100	1430

*Note: This is a general guideline only and is not meant as a substitute from your veterinarian's specific recommendations.*



For most dogs, feeding the RER calories should result in weight loss. In cases that fail to respond, the total number of calories will need to be reduced further. For many dogs, the best way to feed will be by feeding a specific diet food in several meals per day. It is vital that you know how many calories are in the food that your dog is eating, and that you count the calories or measure the food when entering into a weight reduction program. Feeding too much will result in no weight loss and feeding too little can potentially result in serious health consequences associated with malnutrition..

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If you are using a reducing diet obtained from your veterinarian, the calorie content of the food will be on the label, and a member of your veterinary team will help you determine the appropriate amount to feed. If you choose to use an alternate source of food, and this information is not available you will need to contact the manufacturer to get this information.

## **How quickly should I introduce the new reducing diet to my dog?**

"To minimize digestive upsets, mix the old and new diets together in gradually increasing proportions."

When you are introducing a new diet to your dog, you should allow about a week to make the transition. To minimize digestive upsets, mix the old and new diets together in gradually increasing proportions. Start by feeding one-quarter of the new diet mixed with three-quarters of the old diet for one to two days, then increase to half and half for another two days, then three-quarters new food and one-quarter old food for a final two to three days before completely switching to the new diet.

To enhance the palatability of the diet food, try warming the food, adding a flavoring such as ketchup, oregano or garlic, a small amount of salmon juice or low-fat soup broth, or an omega-3 fatty acid supplement.



## **How can I get my dog to lose more weight through exercise?**

"Increase the intensity and length of your daily walk."

The first thing you can do to help your dog lose weight is to increase the intensity and length of your daily walk. Few dogs will naturally walk at a pace that generates the elevated heart rates needed for sustained aerobic activity and weight loss. Based on observations of people walking with their dogs, the average pace is 20 to 25 minutes per mile, which is actually a stroll. They make frequent pauses (on average every one to two minutes) to allow their dog to smell an interesting object or mark territory. Walking for weight loss is very different than walking for

pleasure. You should aim for a daily brisk 30-minute walk. With this sort of walking, you should break into a slight sweat within a few minutes. For details on developing a healthy walking program for your dog, see our handout "Walking Your Dog for Weight Loss".

Some additional simple tips for getting your dog to exercise more are:

- Move the food bowl upstairs or downstairs, changing its location frequently so that the dog always has to walk to get to its food bowl. Fat dogs are smart dogs and if the food bowl moves upstairs, they'll start relocating upstairs, too.

- Use toys, balls, laser pointers, squeaky toys, or sticks to encourage games of chase or fetch. Try to play with your dog for at least ten to fifteen minutes twice a day. There are toys that move randomly and make noises that may also be interesting to your dog. For many dogs, variety is important, and what is exciting or interesting today may be boring tomorrow.

## **How often should I have my dog's progress checked?**

"Each dog is an individual and may require adjustments in the recommended diet or routine."

After you've put your dog on a weight loss program, it's critical that you determine if it's working for your dog. Each dog is an individual and may require adjustments in the recommended diet or routine before finding the correct approach. In general, your dog should be weighed at least every month until the ideal weight is achieved. If there is no significant weight loss in one month, (3-5% of the starting body weight), then the program will need to be modified. Sometimes, making only a slight change can deliver significant improvements.

When my dog is hungry, she pesters me until I feed her. Do you have any suggestions? It is often easier to give in to the dog that wakes you at four in the morning to be fed or the dog that stares at you during dinner or television time until you relent. These dogs have trained us well and know exactly which buttons to press when it comes to getting their way. Here are some tips for handling your pleading pup:

- Do not use a self-feeder. While this seems obvious, auto-feeders are nothing more than unlimited candy machines to a fat dog.
- Pet your dog or play with it when it begs for food. Many dogs substitute food for affection so flip the equation and you may find that playtime displaces mealtime.
- Go for a walk with your dog when it begs. The distraction and interaction may be just enough to make it forget its desire for food.
- Feed small meals frequently - especially give a last feeding for those dogs that like to wake you up in the wee hours begging for more goodies - divide the total volume or calories into four to six smaller meals - whatever you do, don't feed extra food
- When the bowl is empty and your dog is pleading, add a few kibbles to the bowl. A few means only a few - not a handful.
- If more than one person may feed the dog, you should measure out the total daily food into a separate container such as a covered food storage container. Then, everybody knows how much the dog has been fed, and how much is left for the day. If you enjoy giving treats to your dog, feed her several kibbles from the container rather than giving her high calorie dog biscuits.

- Give a couple of pieces of vegetables such as baby carrots, frozen sliced carrots, broccoli, green beans, celery or asparagus. Most dogs love crunchy treats so make it a healthy - and low-calorie - choice.
- Offer fresh water instead of food. If your dog is eyeing the empty food bowl, a drink of cold, fresh water may satisfy the craving.

## **We have more than one dog in the house, and only one is overweight. What should I do?**

"The ideal solution for multi-dog households is to feed the dogs separately."

The ideal solution for multi-dog households is to feed the dogs separately. Feed the overweight dog its diet in one room while feeding the other dog its food elsewhere. After a prescribed time, generally fifteen to thirty minutes, remove any uneaten food.

Do not leave food out while you're away from home. You can't control who eats what when you're not around.

## **How long will my dog need to be on a diet?**

Most dogs will achieve their ideal weight within six to eight months. If the process is taking longer than this, something needs to be changed. A healthy weight loss is between one to five pounds per month based on your dog's size and current condition. Some dogs may need to go slower while others may shed the pounds more quickly.

For most dogs, the secret to weight loss is a dedicated, committed and concerned family. Dogs don't understand that their excess weight is killing them. It's up to us as good stewards to protect them from harm and not inadvertently contribute to their premature death or development of debilitating diseases. Together - veterinary healthcare team, you and your family - we can help your dog achieve a healthy body weight and condition safely and successfully.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM  
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