

More than half of the pet populations in the U.S. and Canada are overweight or obese.

Pudgy pets can be cute, but their bodies may be paying a painful price for that plumpness and your lifetime together may be shorter than it has to be. Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight for your pets shows you love them more than those extra treats—gone in a gulp—ever will.

According to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention in 2019, 59.5% of cats and 55.8% of dogs in the U.S. were classified as overweight or obese.¹ The president of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association estimates that 50% to 60% of Canada's pets are either overweight or obese.²

While studies attribute certain factors to making some pets more at risk for obesity including, but not limited to, breed, age, neuter status, and sex, these factors should not be used as excuses. The reality check is that the primary causes of obesity are eating too much or not exercising enough.³

What's the difference between overweight and obese?

Dogs are considered to be overweight when they weigh 10% to 20% above their ideal body weight. They are considered obese when they weigh 20% or more above their ideal body weight.⁴ For purposes of this brochure, the terms obesity, obese, and overweight may be used interchangeably.



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IBPSA PRESENTS
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

PET OBESITY



What are the risks of pet obesity?

Overweight pets may have reduced life spans. A study published in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* in 2019 compared the lifespans of more than 50,000 neutered or spayed adult dogs of 12 common breeds seen by a network of 900 veterinary practices across North America. The observed dogs were divided into two groups: dogs of normal body condition and overweight dogs. The study concluded that, across all breeds, overweight dogs had a shorter life span.⁵

Additional risks for overweight pets include:

- Arthritis and joint pain
- Some forms of cancer
- Asthma and respiratory issues
- Anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Liver disease

How do I help my pet lose weight?

Start with your veterinarian. Because obesity can be a symptom of an underlying disease, be sure to have your pet's health checked. Next, know that success is up to you. You control the quality and quantity of food your pet receives. It's a mighty power, so use it wisely. They may seem obvious and simple common sense, but here are a few tips and reminders to help you in your healthy pet mission:

Make sure you're not overfeeding. Check the feeding guides for purchased pet food. If

you feed homemade there are several online resources to help ensure you're feeding the proper amount.

Feed high quality food. High quality does not need to mean high price, there are plenty of affordable options on the market. Moreover, a healthier pet means fewer medical bills.

Don't feed too many treats. Remember that pets enjoy spending time with you. They don't need treats to know that you love them.

Help them exercise. An interesting statistic indicates that, on an average weekday, pet owners watch television three times as much as playing with their dogs or cats.⁶ Take a walk together.



Real world inspiration: Tobias

Tobias is a pug who was surrendered to his local shelter at 14 years of age, weighing 37.5 pounds. After he was adopted, his subsequent vet checkup indicated there was no underlying cause for his obesity and he was at least 15 pounds overweight. He struggled to clamber over a single step that led to his new backyard. His new owner put him on a regimen that included high quality dog food, no table scraps, limited treats, taking short strolls, and loads of cuddles. The goal was not fast weight loss but a new and sustainable healthy lifestyle.

Resisting a cute, pudgy face begging for snacks took no small effort on the part of his new owner, but the weight loss commitment resulted in a happy and healthy dog who turned 17 years old, weighing 20 pounds, and flying over that step.



SOURCES

¹ 2018 Pet Obesity Survey Results. Pet Obesity Prevention, 12 March 2019.

² Weight Watchers: Canada's Pet Obesity Problem. Reader's Digest Canada.

³ Pet Obesity. Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

⁴ Williams K, Downing R. Obesity in Dogs. VCA Hospitals, 2018.

⁵ Salt C, Morris P, Wilson D, et al. Association between life span and body condition in neutered client-owned dogs. *J Vet Intern Med*, 2019 Jan-Feb; 33(1): 89-99.

⁶ Pet Obesity Awareness. Pets Plus US, 10 October 16.