

Roly-Poly Pets

What Are The Signs Of Pet Obesity?

For dogs and cats, an ideal weight is based on factors such as age, breed, gender and build. Where your own pet is on the scale may seem like a gray area. Here are a few signs to look for to determine if your pet needs to drop a few pounds, along with some suggestions to help get them and their diet in shape, hopefully without too much resistance from your tubby tabby or portly pup.

What Overweight Feels Like

Dogs and cats enjoy being petted, and it's a perfect time to use this bonding moment with your pet to feel for signs of obesity. While you shouldn't be able to see your pet's ribs or backbone, they should be easily felt. If you can't feel the ribs or backbone, your pet may be obese.

The Shape of Overweight

An easy way to assess your pet's shape is to look down at them from above. If they have a round shape or bulging waist, it's a good indicator that your pet may be overweight or obese. Overweight pets can also have fat on the base of the tail and lower back. Cats sometimes have loose skin that's part of their shape, so look for a rounded midsection as a more accurate indication of an overweight kitty.

Other Signs of a Heavy Load

In addition to a larger shape and being unable to feel ribs or backbone, your pet may show signs of being overweight such as less stamina, difficulty jumping and climbing and a reduced interest in physical activities.

Causes of Overweight and Obesity

Metabolic disorders, such as hypothyroidism in dogs, as well as diabetes, can contribute to an imbalance in your pet and lead to overweight. These conditions should always be ruled out by a veterinarian before placing your pet on a diet.

Most likely, your pet's weight has notched up from between-meal snacks, including treats and biscuits that are easy to overdo. Or too many daily calories resulting from a "free-choice" feeding style, meaning dry food is left out for the pet to eat throughout the day. For cats, it could be too many carbs (they're carnivores) from a dry food diet.

A New Diet – No Reason to Dread It

If your pet is overweight or obese, they will need to have their diet and eating habits revamped to help them drop the pounds. However, just like humans, pets may resist the change in eating habits that go along with a new diet. Your veterinarian can help create a new food plan for your pet that may include a change in feeding styles, serving size and even prescription food. You can also help your pet adjust by slowly switching over to the new diet to avoid stomach upset. There may be some pushback from your dog or cat at first, but with a little patience and a gradual change the new diet can be successfully introduced.



What About Exercise?

Exercise is a great way for pets to jumpstart their weight loss. You may also consider a visit to the vet before starting an exercise program. Just like introducing a new diet, exercise should be gradually added to your pet's daily routine. Start with just 5 or 10 minutes a day and then gradually work up to 30 minutes. When planning your pet's daily exercise remember that dogs shouldn't eat just before exercise to avoid the possibility of gastric bloat, a life threatening condition. Especially deep-chested dogs like Boxers, Great Danes and Labrador Retrievers although any dog can suffer from bloat. You can learn more about bloat at www.petmd.com and enter "bloat in dogs" in the search box.

Long walks for talks and interactive play are appreciated by pups, with indoor cats benefitting from interactive play with a feather teaser or catnip mouse tossed around.

Ready, Set, Diet!

Proper planning with your veterinarian can help your overweight or obese pet reach a healthy weight and avoid the problems associated with extra pounds. Not only will they feel better, a healthy weight may increase your pet's lifespan.

Pet Health Issues Associated With Obesity

- Diabetes
- Aggravated arthritis
- Constipation
- Liver problems
- Lax grooming habits
- Skin infections
- Breathing problems
- Cardiovascular stress
- Pancreatitis

