

# Veterinarians say obesity causing health concerns for pets

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As the number of overweight and obese Americans continues to grow – now at 68 percent of the population – the incidence of obesity in furry family members also is a growing concern. The American Veterinary Medical Association estimates 35 percent of pets are overweight or obese. For pets, just like people, that means a high price to pay in health and quality of life.

Some dogs and cats are living in chronic pain due to excess weight they carry, according to the Community Practice veterinarians at Colorado State's Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Weight loss is one of the safest ways to help alleviate this type of pain. [Overweight](#) dogs are more likely to suffer from joint disease, respiratory disease and other preventable conditions. Overweight cats can be at risk for diabetes and some types of liver disease. These conditions can have devastating consequences and become financially challenging for owners. Managing a pet's weight is important to their overall health and lifelong wellness.

## **Recognizing if a pet is overweight may be a challenge**

Dogs and cats come in all shapes and sizes, so coming up with an ideal weight in pounds is not always practical. The Body Condition Score System focuses on the amount of skin and tissue that can be felt over the ribs as well as the shape over the waist and underbelly. A dog or cat with an ideal body condition will have a visible waist behind the ribs when viewed from above; the ribs can be felt through only a small amount of

fat – and when viewed from the side, the underbelly will be tucked up. A veterinarian can provide guidance in determining an ideal body weight for a pet.

## **Diet tips for Felix and Fido**

Helping a pudgy pup or fat cat lose weight can be challenging, but the results are rewarding when the pet’s pain decreases, energy increases and level of fitness improves.

A successful weight-loss program addresses two major components: the amount of food a pet is eating and their activity level to use those calories. Work with a veterinarian to identify how many calories a pet should eat. The first step is to identify exactly how much food is being given to the pet. Start by using a measuring cup and then identify other sources of calories, such as treats.

It’s important for an entire family to get on board and help pets be successful, so no sneaking treats underneath the table – no matter how sad those brown eyes look. Look for ways to increase activity levels such as encouraging a cat to chase toys or taking the dog for a walk. [Weight](#) loss can be slow, but with patience and persistence efforts will pay off and add healthier years to a [pet](#)’s life.

Provided by Colorado State University

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