

Puppy growth monitoring tool could keep obesity in check

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The ongoing pandemic has prompted an increase in the number of people around the world acquiring a new puppy. Given that obesity in dogs is associated a shortened average lifespan, of up to 2.5 years in

some breeds, and that more than half of all pets in the UK and US are overweight, healthy habits should start when dogs are still puppies.

New research published in *PLOS ONE* highlights the benefits of an easy-to-use growth monitoring tool that owners and veterinarians can use to help keep puppies on track.

Recently, a series of evidence-based growth charts, based on bodyweight, were developed for [dogs](#) across five different size categories. Researchers from the University of Liverpool's Institute of Life Course and Medical Sciences, Waltham Petcare Science Institute, Banfield Pet Hospital, and UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health conducted a study to compare the [growth curves](#) depicted by this set of standards with the patterns of growth in dogs that were healthy, had abnormal body condition, or had various diseases known to be associated with abnormal growth.

Analyzing data from two research sites in Europe (France and UK) and a large network of primary care veterinary hospitals across the U.S., the researchers found that dogs that developed obesity by three years of age gained [weight](#) faster than the growth standards predicted. In contrast, dogs that became underweight by three years gained weight slower than expected.

Study co-author and Professor of Small Animal Medicine at the University of Liverpool Alex German said, "We know optimal growth is crucial for the [future health](#) and wellbeing of dogs, as many of the [health issues](#) that appear during early life are associated with poor weight management. The results of this study suggest that these growth charts can identify healthy growth as well as patterns of growth signaling possible health problems. We hope that veterinarians and owners will find these evidence-based growth standards easy to use, helping puppies to keep in shape and starting them on the right path for their adult life."

In humans, growth standards, such as those created by the World Health Organization (WHO), are used to monitor the growth of children, by comparing an individual's pattern of growth with that of a healthy reference population. These standards can help health professionals identify growth disorders quickly and enable faster interventions. The results from this study suggests that these growth standards for dogs could be used in a similar way, helping pet owners and veterinarians track the weight of a dog and to intervene if its weight starts to creep up.

"Obesity is the major health concern facing our pets today," says Darren Logan, Head of Research at the Waltham Petcare Science Institute. "We developed the Puppy Growth Charts to help owners and veterinarians identify when puppies might be getting off track so they can act sooner to help prevent excess weight before it causes major health problems. This tool supports a positive step towards more preventive [health](#) for our companion animals and another way we are delivering on our purpose: A Better World for Pets."

More information: Carina Salt et al. Comparison of growth patterns in healthy dogs and dogs in abnormal body condition using growth standards, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0238521](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238521)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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