

Fit Not Fat

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Obesity is a growing problem for pets and people, but it's easy to prevent.

Pets are just like humans. If they eat too much and don't do enough exercise they will put on weight. Pets and humans are not born fit and getting fit needs to be achieved, which requires commitment. Pets who stay at their ideal weight tend to have longer and happier lives.

Depending on which statistics you read, somewhere between 30% and 60% of pets in the UK are overweight. In most cases it results from either too many snacks and treats, not enough exercise or a combination of the two.

Being overweight is as unhealthy for pets as it is for humans. Lack of exercise and poor diet can lead to a shortened life-span, heart disease, arthritis and diabetes. One aspect of ageing is that joints become less supple. If your pet is carrying more weight than its joints have been designed to carry then it is likely that it will suffer from joint ache later in its life.

The solution is simple. Pets have a similar calorie equation to humans – if their food energy intake exceeds the energy they require, they put on weight. To help your pet lose weight you need either to reduce its calorie intake, increase its exercise quota to burn off calories or a combination of the two.

Exercise plays a very important role in weight reduction, and it also improves general health. You can't, however, expect an overweight pet to suddenly be able to run a marathon. Exercise should be increased gradually.

Dog walking will not only help your pet but will help improve your fitness too! Research shows that walking a dog helps reduce stress as well as helping you to keep fit.



Playing with cats helps increase their activity levels. Pets in hutches should be let out for a run at least once a day. Hamsters and other small animals benefit from exercise wheels and time out to be handled.



WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT WEIGHT GAIN?

- Check your pet's ideal weight with your vet. Weigh your pet regularly and watch for changes.
- Feed a nutritionally balanced diet and follow the recommended feeding guidelines. Remember each of your pets is an individual and will need feeding accordingly.
- Keep feeding titbits to a minimum – if you do feed extras take them into account at meal times.
- Don't feed cow's milk to either cats or dogs. It can cause stomach upsets and has lots of hidden calories.
- If you think that you will be tempted to feed your pet too much, use a smaller feeding bowl.
- Ensure that your pet is getting plenty of exercise. A small dog should have at least 30 minutes walk every day.



HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PET IS OVERWEIGHT?

- Pet owners should check the ideal weight for their pet with their vet.
- If your pet is 15% heavier than its ideal weight, action needs to be taken.
- An easy method of weighing larger pets, such as dogs and cats, is to weigh yourself and then weigh yourself carrying your pet. Simple subtraction will give you its weight.
- Some simple signs will tell you if your pet is overweight:
 - you can't feel his/her ribs
 - his/her stomach sags and sides bulge
- Overweight pets become breathless quickly and are reluctant to take exercise.

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WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY PET IS VERY OVERWEIGHT?

- It is dangerous to put pets, particularly cats, on crash diets.
- You should always consult your vet if you are considering putting your pet on a weight loss programme.
- Your vet will probably prescribe a special low calorie diet
- Visit www.petsercise.co.uk for more guidance and ideas of exercise routines that you can do with your pet.



Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

The Pet Health Council 
working for healthy pets & people

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.



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