

Overweight Pets - An Epidemic

Obesity related health problems for people in the U.S. are estimated to be in excess of \$70 billion dollars every year.

Unfortunately, our pets offer a reflection of our present society, both in life style and in physique. Obesity in our animal companions is defined as an excess of 15-20% body weight above ideal weight for an individual. Approximately 25-30% of companion animals are considered obese, and the number is rising.

Obesity is the #1 health risk for pets!! As with people, overweight pets have a much higher incidence of health related problems. Pets are much more prone to arthritic joint degeneration, disc disease, hypothyroidism, heart disease, diabetes, and Cushing's disease.

One major difference exists between people and pets when it comes to being overweight: **pets are not responsible for their eating habits and lifestyle ... we are!**

In order to make any progress toward reducing a pet's 'excessive baggage', **the first and often most difficult step is being aware of and admitting that there is a weight problem.** If you are unsure of your pet's ideal weight and body condition, consult a

veterinarian. Different breeds can vary considerably, and even individuals within each breed vary in their ideal weight.

The second major step in pet weight reduction is behavior modification (of the owners). This requires all family members (and even the neighbors that may offer treats, etc.) to be aware of the problem. There must be a commitment to the feeding schedule, quantity of food intake, and the type and amount of treats offered.

Now that everyone is aware of and committed to their pet's weight loss program, it is not just a matter of decreasing food intake. Most pet foods are balanced nutritionally in relation to energy intake (what we want to reduce). If energy intake is reduced by decreasing food consumption, essential vitamins & minerals may become deficient.

All pet foods and pet treats are not created equal. Fiber level, energy density, fat content, protein source and label directions vary considerably. The container may tell you to feed six cups of the food per day, but that may be three times the calories that your pet needs based on his breed and exercise level. Most pet foods are high in fat content (that's what makes them taste good). Fats are a major source of extra calories. Treats and table scraps can also be very high in calories.

Lack of adequate exercise is

also a big contributing factor to overweight pets. Adequate daily physical exercise for your pet cannot be overlooked.

Your pet should have a complete physical exam and blood work prior to a weight reduction program to rule out any predisposing medical conditions.

We can evaluate your animal's current nutrition and body condition and guide you through an appropriate weight loss program for your pet. Proper nutrition needs to be maintained and weight loss should not exceed more than 1% of body weight weekly.

An appropriate weight reduction program requires an initial evaluation, frequent monitoring, and maintenance guidelines in order to be safe and effective. Countrycare tailors weight reduction programs suited to your individual animal and situation.

Many options are available to keep your pet from feeling 'starved': less energy dense foods, low calorie treats, multiple feedings, etc.

Remember that proper weight is a very important part of keeping your pet healthy and happy for years to come.

Pets who maintain a normal weight will (on average) live TWO YEARS longer than overweight pets...NOW is the time to add those years to your pet's life!!! CALL US to get started!

