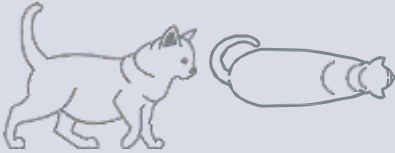


FOOD ISN'T LOVE

There are better ways than food treats to reward your pet and show your love. A walk or other activity, praise or attention, head scratch or belly rub, or toys—things your pet enjoys—can be just as rewarding, and in some cases even help with weight management. If your pet generally receives food rewards instead of these other things, they may begin to rely on food for comfort.

Whenever your pet begs or cries for food, try taking them for a walk or playing with them. Positive rewards like praise, petting, and play can strengthen your relationship with your pet, and support a healthy lifestyle.

PET BODY CONDITIONING SCORING			
	OBESE		
	OVERWEIGHT		
	IDEAL		
	UNDERWEIGHT		
	VERY THIN		

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO KEEP YOUR PET HAPPY AND HEALTHY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

YOUR PET'S
HEALTHY
WEIGHT

*Brought to you by your veterinarian
and the American Veterinary Medical Association*



(C) 2023 American Veterinary Medical Association



Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight reduces your pet’s risk of disease and injury, and gives them the best chance of a long, healthy, quality life.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PET’S WEIGHT IS HEALTHY?

First and foremost, have an honest conversation with your veterinarian about your pet’s weight. Your veterinarian can check your pet’s weight and overall health, and make recommendations specially tailored to your pet’s needs, including nutrition and exercise. But a healthy weight isn’t just a number on a scale. Your veterinarian can also teach you to measure your pet’s body condition and fat stores by looking at their body shape and feeling certain parts of their body.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF KEEPING MY PET AT A HEALTHY WEIGHT?

Keeping your pet at a healthy weight lowers their risk of certain health problems like arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, breathing problems, back problems, kidney disease, and some forms of cancer. It also can reduce your pet’s risk of joint injuries associated with excess weight. And if your pet has arthritis, maintaining a healthy weight can make it easier to manage any associated pain or discomfort.

On the other hand, excess weight can increase your pet’s risk of issues during anesthesia, reduce their life expectancy, and impair their quality of life. For these and other reasons, keeping your pet trim gives them the best chance of a longer, healthier, and pain-free life.

HOW CAN I HELP REDUCE MY PET’S WEIGHT?

It’s probably no surprise, but there’s no one-size-fits-all approach or magic remedy to help your pet shed excess pounds. What works for one pet doesn’t necessarily work for another pet.

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight requires a commitment to a healthier lifestyle that balances the calories consumed with the calories used by the body for normal functions and activity. For overweight pets, even a modest decrease in weight can reduce the chance of some life-threatening diseases.

In simplest terms, weight loss involves reducing your pet’s calorie intake and increasing their activity level to burn more calories. Be patient. It often takes longer to lose weight than it did for your pet to gain it.

Partner with your veterinarian

Working with your veterinarian, make an honest assessment of your pet’s health and weight. Does your pet have any medical problems that might have been caused—or made worse—by excess weight? Is your pet’s weight putting them at a higher risk of health problems? Focus on what matters: your pet’s good health and long life.

It’s not about you

Your veterinarian’s honest assessment of your pet’s weight and health isn’t a judgment of your ability to care for your pet. It’s not about you; it’s about your pet’s health.

Make a family commitment

A commitment to reach and maintain a healthy weight for your pet requires effort and dedication from the entire family. A weight loss plan won’t work as well if family members sneak your pet extra food or treats. Remind your family that there are many ways other than food to show love for your family pet.

Feed a nutritious and healthy diet

All pets require a balanced, nutritious diet. If weight loss is the goal, simply feeding your pet less of their regular food may cause them to miss out on important nutrients. Another thing to consider: the suggested feeding amount on the pet food label might not be the best amount for your pet. Your veterinarian can help you decide which food choices—and amounts—are best based on your pet’s individual needs.

To help your pet feel satisfied with the food they’re given, try using a special bowl, mat, or food puzzle that makes it harder for them to gulp their food, and slows their eating. You can also try toys that release food in small amounts—just be careful to keep the total daily amount of food within a healthy amount. Smaller, more frequent feedings also may help. If you feed your pet kibble, you could even save a small portion of the regular amount to give as treats.

Look out for other calorie sources

When it comes to treats, be careful. Although you might find it hard to resist those sad, begging eyes, the extra calories from treats and other food sources outside your pet’s regular diet quickly can add up. To help fend off weight gain, a good practice is to limit treats to less than 10% of your pet’s daily calorie needs, which your veterinarian can help you determine. Then, reduce the

amount of their regular food by an amount roughly equal to the calories contained in any treats given.

SNEAKY THREATS TO WEIGHT CONTROL

Excess calories can sneak into your pet’s diet through sources other than their regular food:

- Treats
- Table scraps
- Food or treats used to give medications or for training rewards
- Other pets’ food
- Found food or treats, whether indoors (e.g., food dropped by family members), outdoors, or on walks
- Certain dietary supplements

Set goals

Weight loss can be a journey, and having goals along the way can help you appreciate your pet’s progress, even when that progress seems slow. Gradual weight loss is actually a good thing, as rapid weight loss can lead to or signal serious health problems.

Your veterinarian can work with you to develop realistic, achievable goals for reducing your pet’s weight in a healthy manner. Ask for recommendations on healthier eating and exercise that will produce a reasonable and safe rate of weight loss based on your pet’s overall health.

Make it fun

Supporting your pet in an active, healthy lifestyle benefits the entire family. Experts recommend that dogs have at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day, with cats getting three, 5-minute sessions of intense play. A wearable pet activity monitor can be a fun way to keep track of your pet’s activity level. Find activities you enjoy that can include your pet, and the journey will be more enjoyable for all of you.

Monitor and record progress

Once you’ve set reasonable goals to achieve and maintain your pet’s healthy weight, be sure to monitor and record your pet’s progress. As with all weight loss programs, there will be successes, and there will be missteps. By monitoring and recording your pet’s progress, you can determine what’s working and what’s not, and work with your veterinarian to adjust the program accordingly.

JUST ONE LITTLE TREAT...

Our pets mean the world to us, and many of us show our love by giving them treats. It’s easy to forget that pets have different nutritional needs than we do. What might seem like a small treat for you can translate to a large portion of your pet’s daily calorie needs. Here are some examples to keep in mind:

10-LB NEUTERED CAT
PORTION OF DAILY NEEDS (ABOUT 216 CAL):



Alternatives

For cats, try high-protein, low-fat morsels like small amounts of cooked fish, liver, or lean chicken or turkey. And don’t forget about catnip or cat grass!

20-LB NEUTERED DOG
PORTION OF DAILY NEEDS (ABOUT 514 CAL):



Alternatives

Nutritious, low-calorie treat alternatives for dogs include crunchy, uncooked baby carrots, broccoli, celery, and green beans. Remember that dogs don’t do division; break treats into small pieces to save calories.

**Note: Although they may crave dairy products, most adult cats and dogs lack the enzyme to digest the milk sugar lactose, and things like milk or cheese may cause an upset stomach, especially in cats.*