



APONC HEALTH NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025 ISSUE

In this Issue

Happy New Year from the Health Committee!

We hope that everyone enjoyed their Holidays and stayed safe.

As the holidays end, we turned to our own New

Year resolutions and picked one that both

human and dog are familiar with: Weight loss.

We all enjoyed the holiday food but now have to face

the results. We hope that you find some helpful tips

in this article which is being reproduced with

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Cornell Richard P. Riney Canine Health Center.

Obesity and weight loss in dogs

By Dr. Aly Cohen

Updated: June 2024

Obesity is a common condition in dogs that poses several challenges to their health. Making a commitment to help your dog lose weight can significantly improve their health, longevity and quality of life.

What causes obesity in dogs?

The most common causes of obesity in an otherwise healthy dog are feeding patterns such as offering high-fat and low-fiber diets, free-choice feeding instead of portioned feedings, excessive treats or table scraps, and sedentary lifestyles. However, many factors can contribute to obesity, and medical conditions such as hypothyroidism, Cushing's Disease, genetics, or certain medications can also play a role.

What are the risks of obesity in dogs?

Obesity affects nearly every major organ and body system and often leads to shorter lifespans. The most common risk of obesity in dogs is worsening arthritis because the extra weight increases the stress on dogs' bones, joints, and muscles. However, obesity can contribute to the development of arthritis because when there is an excessive amount of fat cells present in the body, they release pro-inflammatory mediators, which can contribute to the development of arthritis by perpetuating the inflammation process over time. Obesity also puts dogs at a higher risk of complications should they need to go under anesthesia because of the added weight on their lungs and respiratory system.

How do I know how much weight my dog should lose?

Start by determining your dog's ideal body weight. Your veterinarian can help to evaluate your dog and rank them with a body condition score (BCS) of 1-9, with 4 or 5 being ideal.

<https://www.purinainstitute.com/search/centresquare?keywords=body%20condition%20score>) An ideal weight allows the ribs to be felt but not seen, and your dog should have a tucked abdomen when viewed from the side and a tucked waist when viewed from above.

Each number on the body condition score deviating from the ideal is approximately 10% of the dog's current weight. For example, if your dog has a BCS of 7 and weighs 75 lb., that means it is approximately 20% overweight. The suggested weight loss is 15 lb., with a target weight of 60 lb. After determining your dog's target weight, you can work with your veterinarian on a weight-loss program to achieve this goal. This weight loss amount and target goal may adjust over time with recheck visits to your veterinarian.

What type of food should I feed my dog for weight loss?

Many dogs do better with a diet specifically formulated for weight loss because these foods have lower calories per cup, higher fiber, and lower fat. When a dog is on a weight loss plan, having higher fiber and lower calories per cup helps them consume a greater volume, feel satisfied, and not exceed their daily caloric limits. A diet intended for weight loss should have around 300 calories per cup. Consult with your veterinarian before switching to a weight-loss diet. If you only use their regular diet (also known as a "maintenance" diet) and restrict their feeding amount, they can potentially develop nutritional deficiencies, so check with your veterinarian about this approach.

How much should I feed my dog?

Your veterinarian can help calculate how many calories your dog needs daily based on age, whether they are spayed or neutered, lifestyle, and body condition score. Once you determine the amount your dog should eat per feeding, correctly measuring its food is crucial. "Heaping" portions can easily add extra calories per serving and sabotage your diet plan.

Can my dog eat any treats when they are on a diet?

Table scraps, excessive treats or treats high in calories often sabotage diets. Treats can be excellent for training, positive reinforcement, or enrichment, but they don't need to be high in calories to fulfill this need. Treats should only compose approximately 10% of their daily caloric intake. Try saving portions of their allocated daily diet to use as treats, offering the wet-food version of their diet in small portions, or using vegetables like peas as treats. If commercial treats are preferred, opt for soft ones that can be easily broken into small pieces. Most dogs appreciate frequency rather than quantity, even if they are small treat portions.

Can I use exercise to get my dog to lose weight without a diet change?

Physical activity will help with a weight loss plan, but it will only make enough difference when included with dietary changes. Low-impact exercises like walking or swimming will help your dog lose weight while maintaining muscle mass and joint mobility. Remember, just like people, if your dog hasn't been physically active for some time, they must slowly acclimate to conditioning their body to avoid injuries.

How do I know if my dog is losing a safe amount of weight on their diet?

Weigh your dog at least every two weeks. While on a weight loss plan, dogs can expect to safely lose 1-2% of their weight weekly. For example, a 50-pound dog could safely lose ½-1 lbs. in a week. Any faster might indicate their calories have been restricted too severely or indicate a health concern, and any slower is feedback that the diet needs to be adjusted.



Dr. Aly Cohen with her dog, Mishka.

Photo provided.

Dr. Aly Cohen is an extension veterinarian for the Cornell Richard P. Riney Canine Health Center and a clinical instructor for Cornell's Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program. She also serves as the contract veterinarian for the Ross Park Zoo in Binghamton, New York.

Dr. Cohen graduated from the Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine, and her veterinary interests include surgery and emergency medicine. She has a Pomeranian named Mishka.

Updated June 2024

EDITOR NOTE:

If you want to read more about pet obesity, the body condition scoring system and how to calculate it, a link is provided below. There is additional guidance as well on managing obesity.

<https://www.petobesityprevention.org/pet-weight-check>