

Park Veterinary Centre

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Obesity in the Dog and Cat

Why is my pet overweight?

Weight gain is normally a result of an increase in body fat. There are a number of factors that contribute to weight gain, including the following:

- **Too much food: -**
This is the main contributing factor. Overfeeding your pet by inadequate measurement of portions OR by giving high calorie treats is not only expensive but also potentially dangerous to your pet's health. The amount of food eaten may not appear to be much, but it is the calorie content of the food ration fed in relation to the individual's metabolic requirement that is important.
- **Limited exercise: -**
Pets that are inactive will be less able to burn off calories during exercise.
- **Neutering:-**
If your pet has been neutered they have a higher risk of weight gain due to an altered metabolic rate.
- **Age: -**
Older animals are quite often less active and therefore require fewer calories.
- **Breed:-**
Breeds such as Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are often predisposed to weight gain.

Why should my pet lose weight?

Being overweight is a danger to your animal's health. Just like people your animal has an ideal weight. An overweight animal has an increased risk from a whole range of clinical problems including:

1. **Disease:**
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes Mellitus
 - Liver disease (cats)
 - High Blood Pressure
 - Chronic degenerative joint disease/osteoarthritis (hip dysplasia)
 - Acute orthopaedic disease (inc. ruptured joint ligaments, spinal disc disease, musculoskeletal pain)
 - Skin disease
2. **Dystocia (breeding problems)**
3. **Exercise intolerance**
4. **Breathing difficulties and heat intolerance**
5. **Increased risk of anaesthetic complications**

Weight management and control: -

If your pet is overweight then the veterinary surgeon will want to check firstly that your animal is not suffering from any of the weight associated problems detailed above, but secondly that there is no underlying medical reason for your pet's weight issue (e.g. an under active thyroid gland).

There are wide ranges of food products available on the market to assist in the maintenance of your pet's ideal weight. Advice can be sought either from your Veterinary Surgeon or from our Veterinary Nurses. When trying to diet a pet it is very important that your pet only eats what is recommended. There must be complete understanding from all family members and anyone that comes into contact with your pet that no **extra** food, tidbits or treats are to be fed.

- **Feeding guide:**

It is important that all dietary changes take place over a period of time. This can be done by slowly introducing a small amount of new food into the old diet until a complete changeover has taken place, usually over a period of about 7 days.

- **Exercise:**

This is an important factor in combating weight loss.

Recommended exercise for your dog:

1. Regular walks
2. Resistance walks – using different surfaces e.g. sand/shallow water
3. Agility classes
4. Fetch – ball games, PLEASE DO NOT USE STICKS

Recommended exercise for your cat:

1. 'Catch the light' – encourage play by shining a torch on the walls/floor
2. Toys – commercial or home-made used to encourage chasing games
3. 'Boxing' – let your cat play in a box or paper bag.

It is recommended that if your pet is in poor health or elderly, he (or she) be checked by a veterinary surgeon before their exercise is increased.

How can the Park Veterinary Centre can help?

Both the veterinary and nursing staff are willing to help with your queries and share their knowledge to help your pet's weight. Please make a **free** appointment with one of our nurses to arrange a weight loss programme for your pet. Regular visits may be necessary to maintain a suitable level of weight loss and help your pet achieve its ideal weight.

Remember this is not an easy task but the rewards are endless and will help your pet lead to a more energetic, longer and healthier life.