



Weight Management for Dogs



Obesity is a common health problem for dogs and it increases the risk of serious diseases such as diabetes, and cardiovascular, respiratory, and musculoskeletal disorders.

The most common cause of obesity in dogs is overfeeding. There are also some other medical conditions that can arise, such as hypothyroidism, that can cause obesity. To prevent obesity, you should adjust and monitor your dog's food intake based on his or her age and overall fitness level. Your veterinarian can help you to determine how much to feed your dog. If your pet is already overweight, a weight loss program should be considered. Before beginning any weight loss programs, make sure to have your dog thoroughly evaluated by your veterinarian to identify any medical problems that could be causing weight gain.

Generally, recommendations for weight loss in dogs are very similar to recommendations for people seeking to lose weight. Program steps include:

- **Portion control:** Make sure to follow the guidelines outlined on your pet's food bag. Always make sure to use a 1 cup measuring cup so that you can be sure you are

measuring out the food appropriately. If your pet is used to "grazing" throughout the day, you can figure out your pet's daily requirements and then offer $\frac{1}{2}$ that amount in the morning and $\frac{1}{2}$ in the evening.

- **Treats:** One of the biggest mistakes that pet owners make is offering their pets too many treats. Jerky treats and milk bones are rather like getting a candy bar with every treat. Instead, you should try offering healthy alternatives such as baby carrots, snap green beans, ice cubes, apple wedges, plain rice cakes (with no salt or sugar added), or even just 4-5 of their daily allotted kibble per day. You can also make healthy treats by mixing plain canned pumpkin and non-fat plain yogurt in equal portions and freezing them into bite sized snacks! It is important to remember that even too much of a good thing can be bad, so offer these treats in moderation. **Please stay away from grapes, onions, macadamia nuts, and raisins as they can be toxic.**
- **The "Green Bean Diet":** Most dogs do enjoy green beans as a treat. As you decrease the amount of kibble that your dog is eating, he or she may act hungrier. You can offer fresh, frozen, or no-salt added green beans along with your pet's meals. This will help to add filler to your dog's diet and allow him or her to feel more full without ingesting too many calories. In general, 1 can of green beans is equivalent to



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approximately 1 cup of dog food. Therefore, if you decrease your pet's food by $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, then you can offer $\frac{1}{2}$ can of green beans instead.

- **Exercise:** Exercise increases energy use and promotes more efficient calorie burning, as well as toning muscles. Please talk with your veterinarian prior to starting an exercise program for your pet. Then, begin slowly, by walking your dog on a leash for 10 minutes per day. Depending on your dog's condition, you can increase each week until you are up to 30 minutes a day of walking. And don't forget—your dog's exercise program can reap health benefits for you, too!
- **Keep a log:** Keeping a daily log may help to modify your own behavior to prevent your pet regaining weight. A daily or weekly log of exercise duration and your pet's weight yields the best results.

What's your dog's body condition score?



1. Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, pelvic bones and all bony prominences evident from a distance. No discernible body fat. Obvious loss of muscle mass.

2. Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Some evidence of other bony prominence. Minimal loss of muscle mass.



3. Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist.

4. Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.



5. Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed.

6. Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernible viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.



7. Ribs palpable with difficulty; heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be present.

8. Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent. No abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distension may be present.



9. Massive fat deposits over thorax, spine, and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and limbs. Obvious abdominal distention.

Which did you answer? If your dog ranked anything other than a 4 or 5, please speak with your veterinarian today to create a proper diet plan to keep him or her healthy for as long as possible!