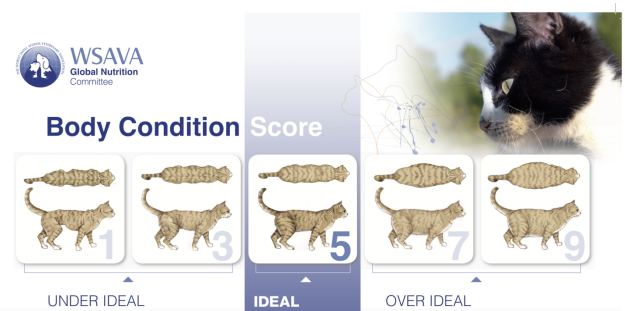
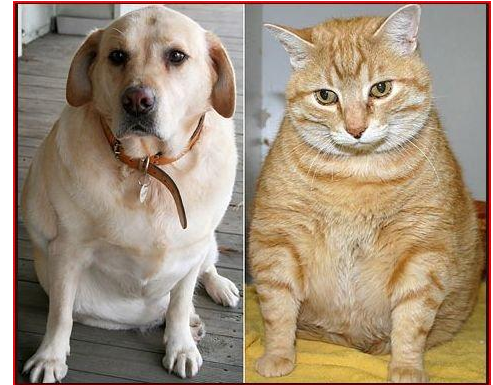


## Obesity

Obesity refers to the accumulation of body fat in excess of what is needed to maintain optimal body condition and health. A pet with a more ideal body condition score will have a small amount of padding over the chest, allowing easy palpation of the ribs, as well as a small tuck up of the abdomen.



### Why is Obesity a Concern?

Obesity has been linked to the development and progression of a variety of health concerns in our pets.

#### *Arthritis & Joint Disease*

Obesity contributes to the development and progression of osteoarthritis, intervertebral disc disease and a variety of orthopedic injuries due to the additional stress placed on joints (including the discs of the vertebrae) and articular cartilage. If pets affected with these conditions undergo surgical correction or stabilization, post-operative rehabilitation is more difficult and return to function typically delayed due to the effect of excess weight. In general, pets suffering with orthopedic disease experience discomfort, resulting in decreased mobility and inactivity. This inactivity results in further weight gain.

### *Respiratory Compromise*

Overweight pets will develop excess deposits of fat around their chest, resulting in an increased breathing effort. The lungs are not able to fully inflate due to an inability to take significantly deep breaths, resulting in cough, exercise intolerance and susceptibility to overheating.

### *Diabetes Mellitus*

The presence of excessive stores of body fat in cats can result in insulin resistance - An inability of the cells to utilize insulin produced by the pancreas. This will result in excessive blood sugar levels throughout the day and the development of diabetes mellitus. Obese cats have been found to have a 50% decrease in insulin sensitivity. Weight management is especially important in decreasing a cat's lifetime risk of diabetes. In addition, weight loss can increase the chance of diabetic remission in previously diagnosed pets.

### *Hepatic Lipidosis*

Many cats respond to illness or stress by refusing to eat. Anorexia in these patients will stimulate the mobilization of body fat stores to provide much needed calories. The liver is not able to adequately process the excessive fat, resulting in infiltration of liver cells with fat (Hepatic lipidosis). Eventually, the liver is not able to function in this state, resulting in liver failure. Overweight cats are at a very high risk of developing hepatic lipidosis within 1-2 days of food refusal. A condition that may have been minor in a healthy pet, becomes life threatening in an obese one.

### *Shorter Life Span*

Many research studies have demonstrated repeatedly that pets in an ideal body condition consistently enjoy a longer lifespan than their overweight littermates.

### *Unwillingness to Accept Therapeutic Diets*

Pets who have been maintained on lower quality pet food, treats or table scraps are often unwilling to accept healthier commercial options, much less a prescription diet that has been modified to manage a specific disease process. This tendency of diet refusal can significantly impact the ability to manage a variety of medical conditions.



### *Increased Surgical/Anesthetic Risk*

Obesity can increase the risk of general anesthesia for a number of reasons. Drug dosages are less accurate, as there is difficulty estimating a patient's lean body weight. Respiration, which is already compromised in overweight patients, is further suppressed during general anesthesia, resulting in poor air exchange and decreased oxygenation. Abdominal surgery is more difficult due to decreased visualization of vital organs and vessels, increased risk of bleeding due to excessive insulation of vessels with fat and impaired tissue handling due to the slippery texture of fatty tissue.

## Causes of Obesity

There are often many factors that contribute to the development of obesity in our pets. Genetics can predispose certain individuals towards obesity, however, there must be an imbalance of caloric intake and need to result in weight gain. Some common contributing factors include:

- Feeding imprecise quantities - A precise measuring cup or gram scale should be used to allow accurate feeding
- Overzealous feeding instructions - The feeding guidelines on many diets is meant as a guideline, however, some pets may require less caloric intake, depending on their activity level, treats, medical conditions, etc
- Children at home - Many pets are skillful at stealing snacks from small humans in their homes, further contributing to their daily caloric intake
- Slow metabolism - Some pets do not burn calories efficiently. This may have a genetic component or can occur as a result of disease, such as hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease. In addition, spaying and neutering often slow metabolism and contribute to the formation of more fat cells.
- High calorie treats - Treats are often not accounted for when owners are considering caloric intake of their pet
- Free feeding / Grazing - This style of feeding prevent precise assessment of nutritional intake

## Management of Obesity

Many factors must be considered while developing a weight loss program for overweight pets. It is important that all members of the family are committed to their pets weight loss journey and that the weight loss is closely monitored by a veterinarian. Some of the considerations include:

- Decrease feeding amount of current diet - This is not ideal, as the pet often feels hungry still and may scavenge the home for other food. In addition, caloric restriction may result in nutrient restriction if the diet is not meant for weight loss
- Prescription weight loss diets - These diets are often higher in fibre to control hunger, while maintaining appropriate nutritional levels during weight loss. Many weight loss diets can be adjusted once ideal body condition is achieved, to allow continued feeding of the same diet for weight maintenance
- Decrease or eliminate table scraps and treats
- Feed a properly measured amount in 2-3 separate meals - Meal feeding ensures better calorie control.



- Feed pets separately to ensure they are all getting the proper amount.
- Routine weight updates to ensure effective and safe weight loss
- Use interactive toys and games to increase calorie burn

### **The Role of Rehabilitation in Weight Loss**

Weight management for obese pets has become a common reason for referral to a rehabilitation center. Aquatic therapy, including the underwater treadmill and swimming pool, is an effective method to burn calories in a short period of time. The resistance of the water results in fast calorie burn by increasing heart rate and muscle mass. Overweight pets are able to exercise more comfortably in water, as buoyancy decreases the stress on joints and cohesion relaxes soft tissues. Therapeutic laser treatment decreases pain and inflammation in sore joints and soft tissue.

Rehabilitation for weight management should be a component of a comprehensive weight loss program, including diet and possibly medication. At Blue Springs, we have a specific interest in facilitating the weight loss journey of our overweight furry friends. We will work with each pet and their families to ensure the development of an appropriate therapeutic plan, diet selection and routine monitoring. For further information about how rehabilitation can help your pet, please contact Blue Springs Animal Rehabilitation Center.

[www.bluespringsanimalrehabcenter.com](http://www.bluespringsanimalrehabcenter.com)