

## That is One Fat Cat /Obesity and Your Pet



It is estimated that 35% of dogs and cats owned as pets are obese in this country. Obesity is a major factor in many health problems including arthritis, diabetes, liver disease, respiratory disease, urinary tract disease and more. The lifespan as well as quality of life of an obese dog or cat is significantly decreased. One study on Labrador Retrievers showed dogs fed an appropriate diet with an ideal body condition lived an average of 1.7 years longer than their overweight counterparts.

**Diabetes Mellitus:** Increased body fat results in insulin resistance the cells in the body becoming resistant to insulin (especially in cats). Over time increased amounts of insulin in the body can result in the development of diabetes. Decreasing body weight significantly improves insulin resistance and is a major factor the treatment of diabetes.

**Arthritis:** Increased body weight puts increased stress on the joints, over time this leads to arthritis. Arthritis results in decreased mobility and decreased activity level which leads to worsening obesity. Decreasing the body weight of a pet with arthritis can significantly improve their comfort level and quality of life. This can also decrease their need for arthritis medications.

**Liver Disease:** If a cat is overweight and stops eating they are at risk to develop hepatic lipidosis. When they stop eating the body utilizes the fat as energy. The cats liver has difficulty processing the fat and as a result it is deposited in the liver cells. The increased amounts of fat within the liver cells actually cause the liver to fail .

**Respiratory disease:** Overweight dogs and cats have large amounts of fat surrounding their chest. This limits the lungs ability to expand and contract which makes the animal work harder to exchange oxygen.

Why are we seeing so many obese pets? Obesity is a result as an imbalance between energy intake and energy expenditure. The number one reason for obesity is excessive caloric intake or increased food consumption. Other risk factors include lifestyle (amount of exercise), type of diet fed, age (older animals are more likely to become obese), hormonal (hypothyroidism) and genetics (breed).

The way we feed our pets has a significant impact on caloric intake. Today's over the counter foods are designed to be highly palatable. Leaving a full food bowl out at all times can result in excessive caloric intake. Measuring how much food you offer is also a frequent problem. Many owners will give one or two scoops of food without actually measuring it. Most food manufacturers make recommendations of how much to feed based on cups per day. All foods are not the same when it comes to calories per cup. When feeding your pet make sure you measure it out. Offering frequent treats or table scraps also results in too many calories. A small bite of meat or cheese may not seem like much to you but can be a significant amount of calories to a 10 or 20 pound dog or cat. Multiply this 2-3 times per day and obesity will result.

Living indoors and a sedentary lifestyle are risk factors for obesity in dogs and cats. Cats are more at risk as they are not routinely let outside or taken for walks. Moderate physical activity will increase the body's energy expenditure by 30%. Lack of activity results in a reduction of energy expenditure and decreased needs for caloric intake. Studies have shown that inactivity below a certain level cannot be compensated for by adequate decreases in food intake. This means that pets that have very minimal exercise will likely gain weight even on a restricted calorie diet.

What can be done if I have an overweight pet? The first step is to consult with a veterinarian. Your pet's body condition score will be assessed as well as recommendations for diet change, proper exercise and a weight reduction schedule. Blood work and other diagnostics may also be performed to assess your pet's overall health status. Some steps can be taken prior to consulting with your veterinarian. I recommend a feeding schedule. Determine how much food your pet needs per day (this will vary depending on the type of food). Split the amount into 2-3 measured feedings per day. Many owners mention that it is difficult to do this with multiple pets as one dog will eat the other dog's food. In multiple pet households you may need to separate them during the feedings. Regular exercise is also recommended. For dogs, routine walks 20-30 minutes two times per day works well. For cats consider food puzzles or placing their food in multiple spots around the house forcing them to hunt for their food throughout the day.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your pet's health contact Jason or Cristie Kutz at Elk Meadow Animal Hospital. Call 303-674-7400 or visit [www.elkmeadowvet.com](http://www.elkmeadowvet.com). You can also email them at [info@elkmeadowvet.com](mailto:info@elkmeadowvet.com).