



Healthy Pet, Happy Pet: Regulate Weight to Ensure Wellness

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If your pets have grown a little rounder lately, they've got plenty of company. More than 52% of dogs and almost 58% of cats in the U.S. are overweight or obese—but most owners believe their pets are a normal weight¹.

What's the source of the problem? Lack of exercise is a factor, with many dogs never being taken for a walk and even more being walked less than once a day². So is over-feeding, as owners may eyeball how much food to put in a dog's dish or might be tempted to give a cat too many treats out of affection. And, depending on a pet's age, breed, reproductive status or pre-existing condition, they may simply be more prone to weight gain than others.

Unfortunately, obesity contributes to numerous health problems, including arthritis, kidney disease, diabetes and torn ligaments³, all of which can reduce quality of life and shorten the precious time we have to spend with our pets. So, if you're not sure whether your pet is at a healthy weight or not, don't wait—get an accurate assessment now and take action if needed. Here are a few tips to get you started.

Maintaining a healthy weight

The best first step is a trip to your vet for a full exam and consultation⁴. If your pet is diagnosed as overweight or obese, it's time to start a weight-loss plan.

Humans are notoriously inaccurate at estimating how many calories we eat, so it's not surprising that most of us do the same with our pets, especially considering their lower energy requirements. A 10-lb cat may need as few as 180–200 calories a day¹, and

between meals and treats, those calories can add up fast. Your vet can provide guidance on how many calories are appropriate, as well as recommend lower-calorie foods that still meet your pet's nutritional needs.

Next, get your whole family involved in order to accurately track how much pets are eating. Each meal should be measured and recorded by the family member who's feeding the pet, and treats should be restricted to a set number per day⁵. (You also can break treats into smaller pieces to stretch them out.) In addition to portion control, here are some tips to consider:

- Incorporate at least 30 minutes of daily aerobic activity, such as walks and playtime with toys, into your pet's routine⁶. On top of being fun for both you and your pet, this will improve your own health and fitness and reduce your medical costs.
- It is important to check with your vet before starting your pet on any new diet or exercise routine.
- Make pets work for their food by using puzzle feeders^{4,6}. You can also move food dishes to new locations every day to allow them to "hunt" for their meals.
- Avoid feeding human foods₅—not only are some of them toxic to dogs and cats, such as onions, garlic, and raisins, but they add unneeded calories and upset the nutritional balance of your pet's diet.

Protection for a healthy future

Still wondering about the true impact of pet obesity? The data tells the story: Over a recent 12-month period, 20% of Nationwide[®] members' pet insurance claims were tied to conditions caused or worsened by excess weight, totaling more than \$90 million in veterinary expenses⁷. Luckily, a Nationwide pet insurance policy can help you save on costs while protecting your pets not only against chronic obesity-related illness, but also against accidents and other acute conditions. Visit [PetsNationwide.com](https://www.petsnationwide.com) or talk to your employer's benefits administrator to learn more about the coverage that's available to you through your employer.

Sources

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