

# WEIGHT CONTROL & EXERCISE FOR DOGS




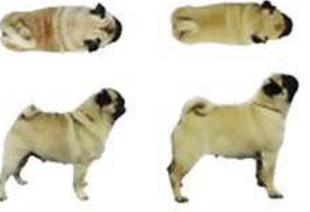
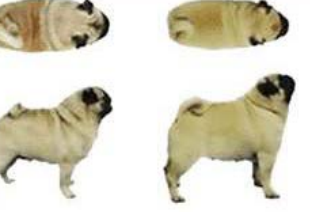
Over half the dogs we see every year are overweight, many extremely so. Being overweight has some serious consequences for dogs, just as it does for people. In fact, the average lifespan of an obese pet is years shorter than that of pets who stay slim and trim. Even at a body condition score of 4 (see chart below), life expectancy is two years shorter.

Weight related diseases include arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, bladder problems and many types of cancer.

## How do I know if my pet is overweight?

Sadly, we are so used to seeing overweight pets in the U.S. that many people think a normal weight pet looks too thin. Some of my employees with lean, fit pets have been chastised by strangers for starving their dogs. We want to see muscles underneath the skin, not fat.

You should be able to easily feel your dog's ribs and backbone under his skin. If there is lots of padding over the ribs your dog is probably overweight. You should be able to see his waist – his body should curve up behind his ribs if you are looking at him from the side. Looking down from above you should also see a pronounced narrowing of the body behind the ribs. Also look for bulges over the hips, a common place for excess pounds to show up.

	<b>3</b> <b>Ideal</b> Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering Waist easily noted Abdomen tucked up
	<b>4</b> <b>Overweight</b> Ribs, spine not easily palpable Waistline absent Obvious abdominal distension
	<b>5</b> <b>Obese</b> Ribs are impossible to feel Massive thoracic, spinal and abdominal fat deposits Massive abdominal distension

It doesn't matter what breed of dog you have. People also sometimes have the misconception that certain breeds should look fatter than others. Every dog of every breed should have a visible waist, tucking in behind the ribs.

On the other hand, if your pet's ribs or backbone are visible, or very pronounced when you run your hands across them, your pet may be too thin. We have specific diet recommendations for that as well!

## **What can I do to prevent my pet from becoming overweight?**

Some dogs are better at burning calories than others, but for most dogs the recommended feeding amounts on the dog food bags are too generous. Feed only what your pet needs to maintain a healthy weight. If you are feeding a **good quality** food your dog can eat less than the label says and still get all the nutrients necessary for good health.

If you are feeding a not-so-good brand, cutting too far back in amount can lead to deficiency in protein, specific amino acids, vitamins and/or minerals.

Please see our other handouts about choosing a good pet food. This doesn't mean a diet recommended by the guy at the pet store or in commercials. Nutrition is a science. Any food you choose should be formulated by a board-certified veterinary nutritionist or someone with a PhD in nutrition. This is not the case for the vast majority of pet foods on the market today.

Choose a pet food which fits your pet's lifestyle. If your dog is very active, look for a food such as Hill's Science Diet Performance™. If your pet is a couch potato, he needs a low calorie food like Science Diet Maintenance Light™ or Senior™.

Limit treats, snacks and table food. A medium Milkbone™ dog biscuit contains over 100 calories. It doesn't take many extras to tip the scales, especially in small dogs. Avoid processed treats – they are loaded with fat and salt, and aren't even good for your pet's teeth. If you must feed treats, give small pieces, or bits of the pet's regular food. Some dogs enjoy bits of carrot, green beans and other vegetables. These make fine, low-cal snacks.

## **Exercise is important, too**

Most house pets are not very active. Not only are many of them overweight but they also don't get enough exercise. This is bad for their health and contributes to behavior problems – a dog that is bored and inactive is more likely to be destructive or aggressive.

Make sure your dog gets the exercise he needs. If your yard is fenced, let him run all he wants. If he tends to be lazy, get him up and moving with a game of Frisbee or ball fetching every day. Walks are fine, although most people don't walk fast enough to give a medium or large dog a good workout. Jogging with your pet, or swimming, usually results in better fitness levels. How often does your dog really cut loose and RUN? Probably not often enough.

If you decide to increase your dog's exercise level, start slowly. Just as with people, an out of shape pet is in no condition to exercise too strenuously. Avoid heat stroke and sore paws from hot pavement by staying indoors on hot days. Especially when the humidity is high. Panting is an inefficient way to get rid of excess heat, so dogs overheat easily. Also beware of too much running on

pavement, as this stresses the joints. Dogs under a year of age, with immature joints and those with arthritis should do most of their exercising on grass.

Most pets become less active with age, so their calorie needs often go down as they get older. Decrease their food accordingly. Most senior pets benefit from a food made for older pets which is lower in fat and salt, such as Hill's Science Diet Senior™.

## How many calories does a dog need per day?

How many calories a pet will burn in a day varies a lot depending on exercise and metabolism. There is more variability in both of these in dogs than cats. An active hunting dog may burn off a couple thousand calories a day. A sled dog running the Iditarod can burn 3000 calories a day! This chart is a good reference for average calorie needs.

Weight	Calories/day
10 lb	218
20 lb	366
40 lb	616
60 lb	835
100 lb	1225

There are big variations in calories per cup in dog foods. It's a federal requirement for pet food packages to list the number of calories per cup the food provides. It may be in small print and difficult to find but it should be there. Most diets contain between 350 and 450 calories, sometimes listed as kcals or kilocalories, per cup.

The rule of thumb we use in the clinic is 1 cup of food per 30 lb of dog. Young, active dogs may need more than this. **When calculating how much food your pet needs to eat, you should use the goal weight, the weight your pet should be.** Your goal should usually be to keep your dog at the weight he or she was at 1-2 years of age.

Grain-free diets can be particularly high in calories because of high fat content. Many are over 500 calories per cup. Less carbohydrate can mean more protein and fat. Despite marketing campaigns that make it seem like a dog's natural diet is a lot of red meat, this really isn't any more healthy for a dog than it is for a human. Dogs are omnivores like us. High fat means high risk for disease.

It's possible to find over-the-counter diets that have less than 300 calories per cup. The lowest calorie highest quality over-the-counter diets are:

- Science Diet weight control formula
- Royal Canin weight control, adult, large breed adult or small breed adult
- Purina ProPlan weight control formula

Over-the-counter weight control diets are not as carefully formulated as veterinary diets, so we worry more about nutritional deficiencies occurring when we are feeding a smaller amount of food to achieve weight

To achieve a reasonable amount of weight loss in a reasonable amount of time you need to cut back in calories by 25-30%.

loss. They are better for maintaining a healthy weight once the pounds have been shed using a therapeutic veterinary diet.

Eukanuba Large Breed Weight Control	240 cal/cup
Hill's Science Diet Light Large Breed	299 cal/cup
Purina ONE Healthy Weight	320 cal/cup
Royal Canin breed-specific diets, e.g. golden Retriever 25	293 cal/cup

### What if my pet is already overweight?

If your dog is already overweight he'll need an exercise program and/or a restricted calorie diet. Most "lite" foods available in supermarkets are at best 10-15% less in calories than regular food. If you feed one of these, and give the same amount of food as you fed of the regular non-diet food, your pet may stop gaining weight, but he probably won't lose any.

Cutting back far enough on a regular adult diet for a pet to lose weight can lead to nutritional deficiencies.

To achieve a reasonable amount of weight loss in a reasonable amount of time you need to cut back by 25-30%. If you try to do this with your dog's regular food, you will almost certainly end up with nutritional deficiencies, plus your pet will feel like it is starving.

The easiest way to achieve weight loss is to feed a prescription weight loss diet. These foods are lower in fat calories, so you can feed an amount large enough to keep your pet feeling full, while still achieving weight loss. These diets have been proven effective with feeding trials and are carefully formulated to provide fewer calories but with sufficient amounts of protein, vitamins and minerals. We generally look for a weight management diet to contain fewer than 300 calories per cup.

The best diets for weight loss are prescription formulations available through veterinarians.

It's very difficult to achieve weight loss with a diet low in carbohydrates (grain) and high in fat. The carbohydrate portion of the food includes fiber, which helps to keep pets from feeling so hungry while they are losing weight. Fiber also encourages healthy intestinal bacteria, which is good for overall health.

### Our favorite prescription diets for overweight pets are:

Hill's R/D – the lowest fat diet we have, with lots of added fiber so your dog or cat doesn't feel like it's starving. Downside: all that fiber can make for more frequent and larger stools.

Hill's Metabolic – contains four ingredients that research has shown work together to change the way fat cells function, leading to more burning of fat and less storing of fat in the body.

Purina OM and Royal Canin Calorie Control are also good choices. Royal Canin Calorie Control small breed formula for dogs, which prevents dental tartar as well as being a weight loss diet.

Hill's R/D	240 calories/cup
Hill's Metabolic	256 cal/cup
Hill's Metabolic Mobility, for overweight dogs with arthritis	291 cal/cup
Iams Weight Loss and Mobility	217 cal/cup
Purina OM	266 cal/cup
Royal Canin Calorie Control	256 cal/cup
Royal Canin Satiety Support for overweight dogs with arthritis	244 cal/cup

### What about treats?

**In order to avoid nutritional deficiencies or imbalances, no more than 10% of your pet's intake should be treats or snacks.** So for a 60 lb. dog, that's only 1-2 medium dog biscuits. A 10 lb. dog should only get 1 small biscuit a day – but could have 6 or 7 baby carrots. There are some tiny treats with only 4-6 calories each but you need to read labels carefully to find them. Check treat labels for sodium content as well, many pet snacks are loaded with salt.

## Weight Management FAQs

### Why are you so concerned with these few extra pounds my pet has gained?

Dogs and cats who are just 15% overweight have a two year shorter life expectancy. The more overweight the pet, the shorter the lifespan. Overweight pets develop arthritis two years earlier. The consequences can also include:

- Intervertebral disc disease (slipped discs), torn ACL ligaments
- Skin infections, anal sac disease
- Cancer, lipomas (fatty tumors)
- Pancreatitis, diabetes, cardiorespiratory diseases, periodontal disease

Overweight cats have much higher risk for diabetes than dogs do. Instead of ACL surgery, you are likely to be treating for diabetes and pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas).

**My pet gains weight in the winter but loses it during the summer. Doesn't that make it less of a problem?**

Each time your pet loses weight the metabolic rate decreases. After several years of this cycle you will find your pet gains weight more and more easily while eating less and less food. This cycle will lead to either permanent weight gain that no longer goes away in the summer, or to protein deficiency, because the pet is maintaining its weight on a very small amount of food. Cut back your dog's food in the fall if he is less active over the winter!

### **Can't I just cut back on my pet's regular food? Why do you want me to buy this expensive prescription diet?**

We recommend prescription diets for weight loss because protein deficiency malnutrition and calcium/phosphorus imbalance is inevitable when an over-the-counter diet is used for significant weight loss. Prescription weight loss diets have extra protein and minerals, so weight is lost safely without the loss of muscle mass due to protein deficiency. We want your pet to lose fat, not muscle and bone.

### **You want me to spend how much for a bag of pet food???**

**Weight loss is the most effective form of pain management we have.** Think of the real cost of the diseases that are linked to obesity – the increased cost of continuing to be overweight can be huge. Arthritis is the most common problem we see. Two years of arthritis medication (Dasuquin and generic carprofen) at today's prices =

- Small dog or cat \$520
- Medium dog \$960
- Large dog \$1422

Blood testing to monitor for medication side effects, assuming basic wellness screening is already being done annually, adds \$70. The cost of hip x-rays with anesthesia is \$400 or so.

The cost of ACL surgery \$3500 per knee. When one ACL tears the other often follows. The cost of rehab following ACL surgery = about \$800 per knee.

For cats, diabetes is also a major risk. The cost of treating and monitoring a diabetic cat varies, but you can expect to spend at least \$1200 the first year after diagnosis.

### **What's the true cost?**

Spending \$250 more over two years for a prescription diet versus an OTC one is far less than what you will spend to treat arthritis. It's a real bargain when compared to an ACL surgery or hip replacement. (In fact, 80% of dogs evaluated for hip replacement no longer need it once they lose weight.)

### **The Cost of Prescription weight loss diet**

12 large bags of canine R/D (1 bag every other month) = \$600

## The cost of over-the-counter dog food

12 large bags of over-the-counter dog food (1 bag every other month) = \$360

**Caring People Helping Pets**



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# **CALORIE CONTENT OF POPULAR DOG TREATS** **(CALORIES (KCAL) PER TREAT)**

## MilkBones®

Original	10 calories
Puppy Biscuits	10 calories
Small Biscuits	20 calories
Medium Biscuits	40 calories
Large Biscuits	115 calories
Extra Large Biscuits	225 calories
Gravy Bones	
Small/Med	35 calories
Large	80 calories
Flavor Snacks	
Small/Med	20 calories
Large	80 calories

## Alpo®

Liver Snaps	13 calories
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## Purina®

Beggin' Strips	30 calories
BusyBone DentalBone	
Large	600 calories
Small/Med	309 calories
BusyBone ChewBone	
Large	618 calories
Small/Med	309 calories
Cheweez Chew Strips	60 calories
Cheweez Chew Rolls w/Meaty Middles	
Large	211 calories
Small	171 calories
TBonz Sizzlin Steak	42 calories

## Purina One®

Adult Biscuits	
Beef & Rice	33 calories
Lamb & Rice	30 calories
Large Breed Biscuits	
Chicken & Rice	84 calories
Healthy Weight Biscuits	
Turkey & Rice	26 calories

## Purina ProPlan®

Adult Biscuits Beef & Rice	35 calories
Lg. Breed Biscuits Ch. & Rice	87 calories
Sr. Biscuits Turkey & Barley	34 calories

## Pedigree®

BreathBuster	
Small	28 calories
Regular	49 calories
DentaBones	
Small	105 calories
Medium	188 calories
Large	300 calories
DentaStix	
Small	49 calories
Regular	70 calories
JumBone	
Small/Med	270 calories
Regular	560 calories
MarrowBone	39 calories

## Meaty Bones®

Small Bones	27 calories
Medium Bones	60 calories
Large Bones	93 calories

## Miscellaneous

PupPeroni	24 calories
Snausages	25 calories
Jerky Treats	21 calories

*There are only 3 calories in a baby carrot, and 30 calories in a half cup of green beans*



