

WEIGHT CONTROL & EXERCISE FOR CATS

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The second most common health problem in cats, after dental disease, is obesity. About half the cats in the U.S. are overweight or obese, and this number has gone up 71% since 2005. Being overweight has some serious consequences for cats, just as it does for people. In fact, the average life-span of an obese pet is years shorter than that of pets who stay slim and trim. Weight related diseases include arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, bladder problems and many types of cancer.

Most of our 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 cat that is bored and inactive is more likely to be destructive or aggressive.

Overweight pets have a two years shorter life expectancy, develop arthritis two years earlier and are more prone to cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

PREVENTING OBESITY

Most cat owners, unless advised otherwise, feed grocery store or pet store dry diets, and leave the dish out all the time. Constant availability of high carbohydrate over-the-counter (OTC) diets leads straight to obesity for many cats. **Food should always be measured out so that pets don't overeat.**

Some cats burn calories faster than others but for most cats, the recommended feeding amounts on food bags are way too generous. If you are feeding a good quality food, your cat can eat much less than the label says and still get all the nutrients necessary for good health. Feed only what your pet needs to maintain a healthy weight.

Just 10 extra kibbles of dry food per day can cause 4 pounds of weight gain by age 10.

The average female cat usually should get about ½ cup of dry food per day, while a larger male cat would need about 2/3 cup. One 5.5 oz or two 3 oz cans of food are roughly equal the ½ cup of dry food.



Cats prefer to eat many small meals per day. This most closely matches their natural daily rhythm, which involves hunting and catching small prey multiple times a day. Automatic feeders make feeding this way easy. Some can be keyed to a cat's microchip or an RFD tag, so they only open for one cat. This makes feeding multiple cats different foods more manageable.

Choose a good quality pet food which fits your pet's lifestyle. If your pet is a couch potato, he needs a low

calorie food like Science Diet Feline maintenance Light™. See our handout Foods We Recommend for specific brand recommendations.

Limit treats, snacks and table food. It doesn't take many extras to tip the scales. Avoid processed treats like Pounce™ that are loaded with fat and salt. If you must feed treats, give bits or the pet's regular food.

Make sure your cat gets the exercise he needs. If he tends to be lazy, get him up and moving with a game of chase the string or roll the wad of paper. How often does your cat really cut loose and RUN? Probably not often enough. Overweight people who exercise are healthier than those who don't. Exercise helps even if your cat is still too heavy.

HOW MANY CALORIES DOES MY PET NEED?

How many calories a pet needs per day varies a lot depending on exercise and metabolism, but we can give you averages.



Weight	8 lb	10 lb	12 lb	14 lb	16 lb
Calories per day	180	200	230	260	280

When calculating how much food your pet needs to eat you should use the goal weight, the weight your pet should be.

A mouse has about 35 calories so a cat would need to catch and eat 5-8 mice per day – and since hunting burns calories, in reality that would go up to 8-15 mice per day. That's a lot of work!

Good OTC cat foods for weight management typically contain about 300 calories per cup. An average cat would need somewhere between ½ and 2/3 cup of Science Diet, Iams or Purina indoor or weight management diet per day.

Some OTC cat foods contain more than 500 calories per cup. Evo, for example, has 530 calories per cup! A 10 lb. cat would only need 1/3 of a cup per day of

food, which looks awfully puny why cats eating these carb" or "grain free" diets are obesity. Even Evo's "weight diet has 481 calories per cup.



in the bowl. This is "natural," "low so prone to management"

Most pets become less active calorie needs often go down as Decrease their food senior pets benefit from a food pets, which is lower in fat and these diets are not appropriate for thin, elderly cats.

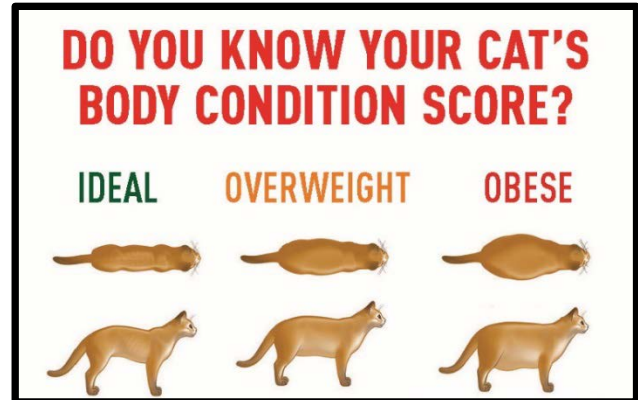
with age, so their they get older. accordingly. Most made for older salt. However,

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CAT IS OVERWEIGHT?

You should be able to easily feel your cat's ribs and backbone under his skin. If there is lots of padding over the ribs your cat 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 or a pot belly, common places for excess pounds to show up. (Many cats have a pouch of fat and skin between the back legs, even if they are not overweight. This is not the same as a "pot belly" from internal fat.)

There are two scoring systems for assessing body condition. We use the 5 point scale, where a score of 1 is very thin, 2 is thin, 3 is ideal or normal, 4 is overweight and 5 is obese.



CAT METABOLISM IS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF DOGS AND HUMANS

Unlike dogs and people, who feel full when they have eaten enough calories, cats feel full when they have eaten enough **protein**. When eating a diet lower in protein and higher in carbohydrate or fat, they tend to overeat because it takes a lot of food to get enough protein to achieve satiety – that "full feeling" of having eaten enough. Protein content is very important for weight loss in cats.

Along with obesity rates, diabetes cases in cats are soaring. Diabetes is an inherited disease but it often will never develop if a cat is maintained at a healthy weight. The more obese a cat becomes, the more likely it will become diabetic. The risk is highest in middle aged cats 8-12 years old, and males are affected twice as often as females. High protein, low-carb diets are used to treat both obesity and diabetes. Again, you cannot determine what cat foods fit this profile from a pet food label.

It's difficult to create a dry food nugget with minimal carbohydrates because carbs are needed to create a dry food that holds together and doesn't get rancid. Canned diets, on the other hand, can be very low in carbohydrate. The dry versions of prescription "low carb" diets for cats contain about 15% carbohydrate while the canned versions contain only 5%.



WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

If your cat is already overweight he'll need an exercise program and/or a restricted calorie diet. Most "lite" foods available in the supermarket are only about 10-15% less in

calories that regular food. If you feed one of these, and give the same amount food as you fed on the regular non-diet food, your pet may stop gaining weight, but he probably won't lose any.

The first step is still to measure how much you are feeding per day and to cut back from there. Given unlimited access to food, it's no wonder pets get too fat! Start by measuring how many cups of food you put in the bowl over the course of a week. Then divide by seven to get the amount fed per day (usually ½ to one cup). Now you need to feed a smaller amount of food. If your cat is eating a cup of food per day, you might want to only give him ¾ of a cup. Divide this amount into at least three daily feedings.

If you switch to a store brand "lite" diet you won't need to cut back as much on the amount you feed as if you stay with a regular maintenance food. If you feed a prescription reducing diet you may not need to cut back at all in amount, as some of these foods are high in bulk and fiber. Either way, it's very important to measure the amount you feed! That lets us adjust the amount fed as the cat loses weight.

PRESCRIPTION DIETS

The easiest way to achieve weight loss is to feed a prescription weight loss diet. OTC diets are required by law to provide nutrition that fits within certain parameters. These parameters don't allow for nutrients to be added in therapeutic amounts – extra fatty acids to treat arthritis, for example. Prescription or therapeutic diets are different. They can contain more or less of some ingredients than is legally required for an OTC diet, such as lower amounts of fat or extra fiber. (Hill's has copyrighted the word "prescription" for pet food, so other manufacturers use the word "therapeutic" for their veterinary-specific diets.)

If we had our choice, we would have every patient on a prescription diet! There is no pet that couldn't benefit from at least one of the extra benefits that high quality prescription diets provide.

To achieve a reasonable amount of weight loss in a reasonable amount of time you need to cut back calories by 25-30%. Therapeutic weight loss diets are low in fat and calories, so you can feed an amount large enough to keep your pet feeling full, while still achieving weight loss. The weight-loss diet highest in protein is Purina OM™, so that is our favorite weight loss diet for cats.

A "grain-free" diet can still be high in carbohydrates, it will just contain potatoes or green peas instead of grain. It may also be high in fat.

You can usually feed a larger volume of a prescription weight loss food than an OTC food. For example, Hill's feline R/D™ prescription weight loss diet has about 260 calories per cup, with more fiber and protein but a lot less fat than a regular cat food. A cat eating R/D could eat ¾ cup per day, so he or she would feel full and satisfied while still losing weight.

We also have specific prescription weight-loss diets for cats with multiple medical issues, such as urinary tract disorders or food allergy.

Therapeutic diets have been **clinically proven** to have health benefits, with research and quality control behind them. No matter how good pet food ads sound, most brands do not provide this level of nutrition.

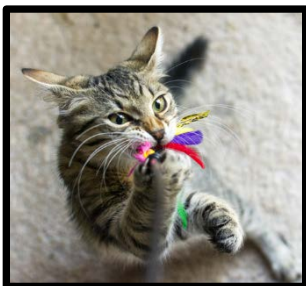
Prescription diets have been tested and approved by the FDA, just like drugs. They are made in the company's own facility so they have control over things like ingredient testing, cleanliness and processing. Nothing goes in the food that isn't on the label and nothing is on the label that isn't in the food. They have their own laboratory on-site so they can test each batch of ingredients and each batch of finished food to make sure it meets their standards. The facilities are inspected and are open for tours by veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Their nutrition research is published and the results of extensive food trials and testing on live dogs and cats are utilized when they formulate their diets.

People are heavily influenced by marketing and PR when it comes to pet foods. Words like "no corn," "grain-free," "natural," "premium," "human grade" and "holistic" are thrown around with abandon yet mean very little as far as determining the quality of a pet food.

NO-BOWL FEEDING SYSTEMS

For cats, hunting is part of what brain scientists call "The Seeking Circuit." In the seeking circuit, the brain releases dopamine, which heightens arousal and creates a feeling of anticipation. Each small meal, usually consisting of a single mouse, completes the cycle and leaves cats feeling satisfied and complete. Cats need to engage in the seeking circuit many times a day to be mentally and physically healthy.

Eating from a bowl denies cats this natural cycle, yet the need to hunt remains instinctual. Toys engage cats in the seeking circuit, putting them in a heightened state of arousal. However, the



circuit is not completed without the food reward. This leaves them in a heightened state of arousal without the satisfaction of finishing the hunt.

In nature, cats hunt and engage this seeking circuit between 9-20 times a day, usually most actively around dawn and again at dusk. Now you know why your cat might wake you up to eat in the wee hours of the morning! His or her brain is set up to start seeking prey about this time.

The top 5 reasons people purchase the NoBowl Feeding System:

1. They are looking for a way to engage their cat while they are not at home
2. Their cat "scarfs and barfs" at least once a week
3. Their veterinarian recommended Environmental Enrichment for their cat
4. Their cat wakes them up early looking for food
5. They are looking for a way to feed in a portion-controlled way to maintain a healthy weight

Cats spend an average of 6 hours a day seeking their food, which provides them with the majority of their daily exercise. When we remove the opportunity to hunt, we deny their natural instincts and disrupt their natural rhythms. This is stressful for a cat and can lead to physical, behavioral and mental problems.

Taking away the food bowl and replacing it with feeding toys is an excellent way to satisfy your cat's natural hunting drive. Instead of filling a bowl, you would divide a day's worth of food into multiple toys, usually 5 or 6 of them, and distribute them for your cat to find. These toys are batted around and dribble food out a little at a time. Once transitioned onto the system, your cat will hunt, find their meal, and then play with it to get the food reward. Satisfied with this healthy portion, your cat will groom and rest until hunger motivates the next hunt, just like in nature.



We like the SlimCat ball by PetSafe, as well as the new NoBowl Feeding System that uses mouse-shaped toys with stretchy "skin" to more closely resemble the real thing. You can also make your own feeding toys out of toilet paper cardboard tubes with the ends crimped mostly closed or small plastic containers with some holes cut into the sides.



If your cat tends to wake you up at night, hide a few of these throughout your house, in different spots each evening, for her to find while you are sleeping. If you have more than one cat you may want to keep them in separate areas, at least during designated hunting times. Everyone can come back together again at other times, to play or relax together.

Scientists agree, cats need to hunt, not be served from a bowl. Feeding toys replace the bowl with the hunt, letting your cat stalk, trap and play with its food - the way nature intended.

Please let us know what we can do to help you keep your pet in the peak of health. We welcome you anytime put your pet on our scale or ask our opinion on his/her current weight or weight loss goals.

Caring People Helping Pets

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