



Weight Control in Pets

How many dogs and cats are overweight or obese?

A recent study conducted by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) found that 41% of dogs and 32% of cats in Australia are either overweight or obese.

Are some breeds more predisposed to weight gain?

Whilst any dog or cat breed can become overweight, some are more at risk. This may be due to behaviour and personality (we all know Labradors will eat anything!), genetics, lifestyle, or owner factors. Some of the more commonly over-represented dog breeds are Beagles, Pugs, Labradors, French Bulldogs and Staffies, while Burmese cats are often the weightiest in the feline world.



What health issues are associated with obesity?

Obesity significantly lowers your pet's quality of life, and shortens their life span. Just like in humans, being overweight puts pets at risk of many serious conditions and life-threatening diseases such as diabetes, joint pain, respiratory issues, cardiac issues, and even reduces their ability to heal wounds and fight disease.

Brachycephalic dogs and cats (those with flat faces, such as Pugs, Persians, French Bulldogs etc) have a reduced ability to breathe effectively even when they are in 'perfect' health for their breed. If they are overweight, this places additional strain on their already impaired systems, making them at much greater risk of suffering from heat stroke, respiratory distress, and even death.

Shockingly, up to 90% of obese cats suffer from diabetes. In addition, cats who are overweight have reduced mobility, including a reduced ability to groom themselves, leading to skin issues resulting in infections and pain.

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Pets who are overweight may also suffer emotional distress. They are unable to exercise effectively, and so tend to play and interact with their owners and other pets less than they otherwise would. The added stress on their joints leads to an earlier onset of arthritis and associated pain, which adds to the reduced ability to exercise. Trying to move a heavier body quickly is difficult; overweight pets are unable to run from danger or frightening stimuli, and may be more prone to injury from other animals (cat fights, dog bites), vehicles, or even humans. Cats are less able to hunt, and dogs find it difficult to exercise freely and scent their environment, which leads to emotional distress for both species.

How can I prevent my pet from becoming overweight?

Maintaining your pet's healthy weight is super important for their physical and mental health. Just like in people, bodyweight is ultimately dependant on many factors, but diet and exercise play just as big a role in our pet's health as they do in our own. To help your pet stay at their optimum weight, ensuring they enjoy a good level of physical activity for their breed and age is just as important as feeding a quality diet suitable for their individual needs. Feeding a properly balanced commercial pet food that is appropriate to your pet's breed, lifestage and lifestyle is especially important. Avoid feeding 'human food', and definitely keep an eye on the treats!

What can I do to help my pet lose weight?

If, despite your best efforts your pet does become overweight, we recommend addressing their diet and activity levels as a priority. It is also important to bear in mind that there are some health conditions that can be responsible for altered metabolism and changing fat deposition, so it is often worthwhile having a



consultation with one of our vets before embarking on a weight loss programme.

Once medical causes have been ruled out, our vets will put you in touch with our **Weight Loss Programme Coordinator, Nurse Sarah**, who will be able to develop a plan individualised to your pet, your budget, and your lifestyle. Nurse Sarah will design a diet and exercise programme to suit your pet, support you on their weight loss

journey, serve as a point of contact within the clinic, and will help you with any questions you may have. She will recommend a schedule of regular weigh ins, and will help you to choose the food best suited for your pet.



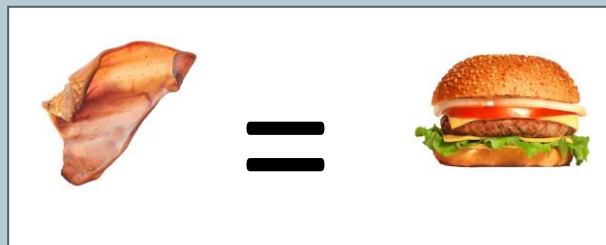
1. Exercise

Providing exercise opportunities for cats may appear daunting at first, but most cats will appreciate the chance to play hunt or even have a run or a climb on a regular basis. Just as with humans, boredom often leads to overeating, and indoor cats who have little stimulation will often eat just for something to do. Providing your cat with chasable toys such as skittering or rolling objects will entertain them and encourage physical activity. Treat balls, Kitty Kongs, or other reward based toys are often favoured by cats. Climbing frames, scratching poles, and feeding cats at a height encourages jumping and stretching. Outdoor cats are usually able to exercise effectively through hunting and play behaviours, but those in cat runs or enclosures will benefit from activities such as scattering kibble or providing toys.

Exercising dogs is usually fairly straight forward, as most of our canine friends will happily look forward to playtime or their daily walk. But what happens when we are unable to walk our dogs due to environmental or behavioural concerns, or even our own health or lifestyle limitations? For dogs that can't be easily walked in public, playing fetch in the backyard is always an option, just be sure to use an appropriately sized ball or toy, and best to stay away from sticks. For dogs with musculoskeletal injuries, or those who just don't enjoy playing fetch, scattering low fat treats in the grass or around the backyard can be a fun and engaging treasure hunt that helps keep them active.

2. Diet

The most effective weight loss diet for your pet will depend on many factors, and there are many brands and formulations available. In most cases, Nurse Sarah will talk with you about Royal Canin Satiety, a precisely formulated and fully balanced dry food for dogs and cats that safely provides fewer calories, high fibre and high protein, resulting in successful weight loss. In pilot studies, most pets who were exclusively fed Royal Canin Satiety lost weight within three months. This food helps to keep pets full for longer, reduces appetite, and maintains muscle mass while losing body fat. We've had great success with this food for both dogs and cats.



One pig's ear is equivalent in calories to a whole hamburger!

Taking care with treats is super important! Feeding your pet the correct volume of weight loss food is more than half the battle, but if us humans eat salad all day and chocolate cake every night, we'll still be fat! All those little treats here and there really add up, and we must remember that those dental chews every morning, and that bone biscuit every night, still form part of our pet's total daily caloric intake. Feeding treats is OK, but for every treat, we must remember to reduce the animal's ration by the same amount of calories. Calculating this is pretty tricky, so it is best to stick to feeding super low calorie items. Fruits and vegetables with a high water content such as carrots, celery and watermelon make great low calorie treats.

Association for
Pet Obesity Prevention

Body Condition Score (BCS) for Dogs

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Very Thin 20% under ideal weight	Thin	Ideal	Overweight	Obesity 30% over ideal weight					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribs, spine and hip bones are easily visible (coat may interfere with observation) Fat can not be seen or felt under the skin Obvious loss of muscle mass Extreme waist and abdominal tuck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribs, spine and hip bones are easy to feel and visible Fat can not be seen or felt under the skin, especially around the ribs and lower back Obvious waist and abdominal tuck Some muscle loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribs, spine and hip bones are easily felt and may be visible (coat may interfere with visibility) A waist and abdominal tuck are seen when viewed from above and side Fat can be felt around ribs, spine and hip bones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribs, spine and hip bones are not visible and difficult to feel Excess fat is felt around ribs, spine and hip bones Waist and abdominal tuck are minimal or absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ribs, spine and hip bones are difficult to feel under a thick layer of fat Waist and abdomen distended when viewed from above and side Prominent fat deposits over lower spine, neck and chest 					

German, A, et. al. Comparison of a bioimpedance monitor with dual energy x-ray absorptiometry for noninvasive estimation of percentage of body fat in dogs. *AJVR* 2010;71: 593-598.
Lallamne DP. Development and validation of a body condition score system for dogs. *Canine Pract*. 1997; 22: 10-15

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The perfect body condition (weight) is less about the number on the scales, and more about how your pet looks and feels

How long will all this take?

We know with ourselves that reaching a goal weight is not a quick and easy process, but takes months of dedication. This is no different with our pets. A healthy rate of weight loss is around 1-2% of your pet's current bodyweight per week. This means that most cats will reach their target weight within about 6-8 months. Of course, this duration will vary significantly based on a multitude of factors, including the pet's starting weight, goal weight, breed, sex, activity level, genetics, diet, and others.

As an example, a Labrador that should weigh around 30kg, has weighed in at 40kg. Therefore, ensuring a safe rate of weight loss, it may take at least 4 months and up to 8 months for this dog to reach their target 30kg weight.



What are the costs involved?

Due to the variability of diets that may be recommended and the time taken to reach the target weight, there is no fixed cost for the process.

As an indication, Royal Canin Satiety varies in price from around \$60 for a 1.5kg bag of feline dry food, to around \$250 for a 12kg bag of the canine formulation. The good news is that we don't have to feed very much of it to reach the correct daily calorie intake for our pet.

**Nurse Sarah's Weight Loss Programme
is completely
free of charge!**



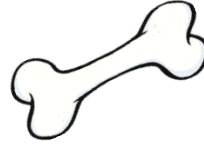
Tips to help your pet lose weight



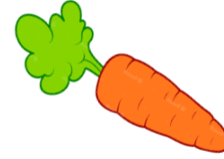
Quality &
quantity of food



Appropriate
portion
control



Daily calorie
count
including
treats



Include more
veggies in
diet



Increase your
pet's exercise



Rule out
medical
conditions



Prescription
weight loss
diets

How do I get more help with my pet's weight loss journey?

Please give The Vet Clinic a call 6 days a week to speak with our lovely nurses who can advise on the best course of action. At the beginning of your pet's weight loss journey, a consultation with one of our vets is advised to first rule out any medical concerns. Once given the all clear, we can then arrange a time to sit down with Nurse Sarah to formulate a plan for your pet. Of course, you are welcome to bring your pet into the clinic for a weigh in at any time!