

# OBESITY AND WEIGHT LOSS IN CATS

The New Year is upon us, and many of us have already abandoned our good intentions to limit how many cookies and sweets we consume. I imagine there are many pets joining their owners in happy munching on the sofa. We know that being even slightly overweight has undesirable consequences for humans. The same is true for our pets. Determining body weight is a simple and standard part of your pet's physical exam. Knowing how much your pet weighs gives the veterinarian a good indication of total body health. We will focus on obesity and weight loss of cats in this article.

Since obesity often begins in young cats, it is very important to manage their weight as they age. Obesity is a metabolic disease with hormonal, metabolic, and inflammatory changes that requires immediate attention. Obesity is a risk factor for diabetes, osteoarthritis (OA), respiratory distress, lower urinary tract diseases, and early mortality. Simply stated, obesity occurs when more calories are ingested than are expended through exercise and play.

Metabolism also plays a part in weight management. Cats metabolize carbohydrates differently from dogs. Moreover, some cats with certain conditions, such as chronic kidney disease (CKD) require specific diets, further complicating the issue. As a cat ages, changes in metabolism and hormones may affect its ability to adequately digest protein. The key is to feed a cat sufficient high-quality protein without exacerbating any underlying conditions. A veterinarian can suggest the type of food that best fits your pet's particular needs.

When your cat becomes senior (at 7 years old) or geriatric (at 12 years old), it is very important to schedule a routine exam twice a year. That way your vet can alert you to early signs of age-related problems. Loss of normal body mass is a clinical sign that something is going on. Muscle wasting may result from lack of exercise and poor diet, but sometimes can signal something more serious.

If your pet is overweight or underweight, it is best to seek the help of your veterinarian sooner rather than later. Addressing the problem may be as easy as managing your cat's diet and exercise. In any event, a simple weight check in the vet's office is often the first step in ensuring that you and your pet have many happy years together.



