

Wilmette Pet Center

"the place for people who love pets"

So many of us start of the new year with one resolution: to lose weight. We know how unhealthy excessive weight is, and yet never consider what it does to our pets. The American Veterinary Medical Association estimates that about 40% of all dogs and 50% of all cats are overweight - that's 28 million dogs and 40 million cats! Fluffy may look fat and happy, but obese pets have more health problems, from cardiac and respiratory issues, and major problems with their joints, to diabetes. So this year, why not make a resolution to help your cat or dog slim down?

What is a healthy weight for your pet?

Various breeds have different normal weights, and it can depend on gender, too. It can be especially hard when we have so many dogs whose exact breed we don't know. In addition to discussing your pet's weight with your vet, you can also use these general guidelines to help determine is your dog is overweight.

1. Running your hands along your dog's ribcage, you should be able to palpate the ribs covered by a thin layer of fat. Inability to feel the ribs is a sign of an overweight dog.
2. Looking at your dog from the side, you should be able to see the upward tuck of the abdomen. An overweight dog will have very little or no tuck.
3. Viewing your dog from above, there should be a moderate narrowing at the waist just past the ribcage. A straight or bulging line from the ribcage to the hips indicates an overweight dog.

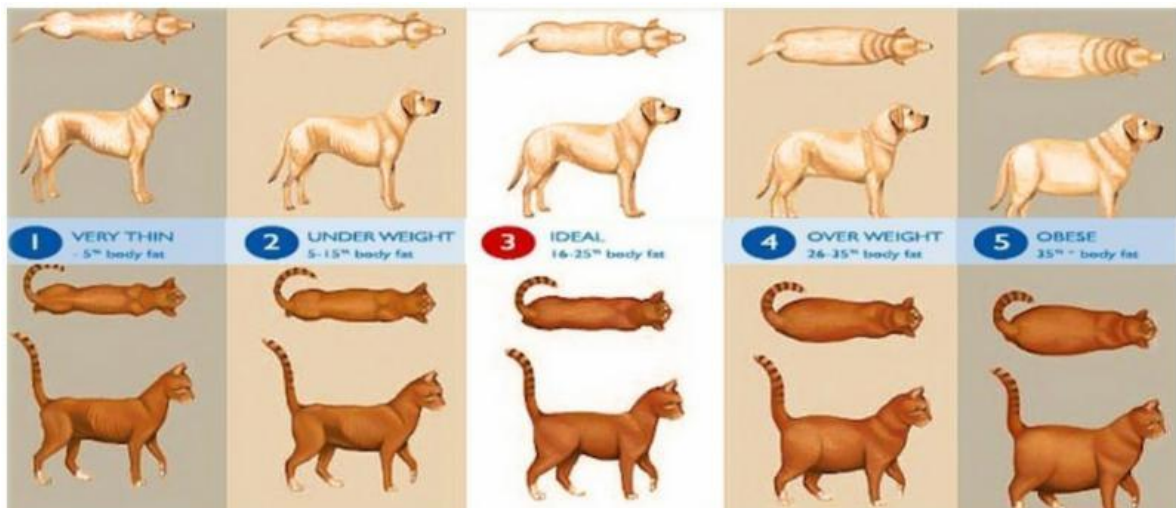


Chart for checking your pet's weight

It's similar for cats: Look down at your cat. You should be able to see a waist when you look down on it from the top, or when you run your hands from its ribs to its hips. Run your hand along its abdomen from its ribs to its pelvis and it should be indented. If you put your hands on the side of its chest, you should be able to feel its ribs without a thick layer of fat over them.

It's a good goal, but how do we do it?

Begin by knowing. For one week, record everything you give your dog or cat: measure dry and canned food, all treats, even table scraps. This can help show you where/when you tend to over-indulge your pet, and ways to cut down. Want to go a step further? Figure out the calories you're feeding. Add the calories from the dry and/or canned food (found on the packaging) to the calories of the treats. Discuss with your vet your particular pet's caloric needs, and make the appropriate adjustments.

Make adjustments. Not every dog eats the same amount of food. More active dogs, or dogs that spend time outside in the cooler months, need more calories than a more sedate, indoor dog. Older dogs need fewer calories than healthy adult dogs, and puppies generally need more. Using enzymes such as [Prozyme](#) help your pet effectively digest more of the food they eat and helps give them a feeling of fullness (so they eat less).

Limit treats. Often overlooked when considering your pet's diet, treats can make a big impact on their weight. Those small bites can add up quickly! Ideally, treats should be less than 10% of your dog or cat's total daily calorie intake. A few tips:

- Break up your treats into the smallest piece you can. Dogs will jump through a hoop for the whole bag of treats and they'll jump through a hoop for the smallest crumb. They still feel special, you make the treat last a lot longer, and reduce the calories they take in.
- Use treats effectively. By only offering them only for good behavior and training, you reduce their caloric intake and reinforce positive behaviors.
- Feed pure, freeze dried meat treats such as [Whole Life](#) or [Orijen](#). They are high in protein and have no carbs, and ideal for your cat or dog.

Go with a high protein, low carbohydrate food. Dogs and cats are carnivores, meaning they evolved to use protein and fat for energy. Simple carbohydrates break down to sugars in the digestive system, and sugar converts to fat. Decreasing carbohydrates reduces excess sugar, limiting fat production (and decreasing a most important source of food for cancer cells). Come by and talk with any of our staff about our choice of high protein, low carb foods such as [Fromm](#) grain free, [Orijen](#), [Stella & Chewey's](#) and [Nature's Variety](#).

Fiber is weight loss's best friend. Supplements such as [Fruitable's](#) Pumpkin blends and the Missing Link supplement are full of fiber, which helps with weight loss by helping your cat or dog feel more full.



Feeding canned and/or raw frozen can help with weight loss. These diets contain more water than dry kibble, making them feel more full and reducing the amount of calories they consume.

Feed twice a day. Many people leave their pet's food down all day; it's easier, but some animals will continuously eat, past the point of satiety. Keeping the meals restricted to two meals not only restricts calorie intake, but gives them the chance to burn some off in between feedings.

EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE! It's *always* the answer for losing weight (for our pets and for us), and is specially challenging at this time of the year. Including the dog on a short jog not only helps them lose weight, it'll help keep you on your own health goals. Make a point to set aside some playtime with your dog or cat. Playing with your dog can burn 115 calories an hour, better than 75 calories sitting on the couch. Playing with your pet is also a great way to de-stress and relax! Try using a laser pointer to get your cat to move more (it's great for us, too, since laughter is a great healer).

Reducing your dog or cat's weight is one of the best things you can do for their health. It'll reduce wear on joints, reduce breathing problems, decreases the strain on their heart, and reduce the chances for diseases such as cancer and diabetes. It'll also keep your best friend around a lot longer.