

## Information from your veterinarian

### **Obesity: *The Skinny on Fat***

Obesity exists when body weight exceeds the optimum for the individual pet by 15 percent or more. Obesity is the most common nutritional disease in the dog and cat. It is estimated as many as 44 percent of all dogs and at least 12 percent of all cats are overweight. Obesity is more common with advancing age and occurs more often in females than males.

#### **Signs of Obesity**

If you're not sure what your pet's optimum weight is, the most practical way of evaluating your pet is to check the amount of fat over his or her rib cage. Place your hands on your pet's rib cage with your thumbs on his back. If the ribs are easily felt your pet is considered to be normal weight. If you can feel fat between the skin and ribs or the ribs are difficult to feel, your pet is overweight. If the ribs cannot be felt, your pet is obese. In some pets, particularly cats, a large abdomen that hangs down or protrudes to the sides, indicates obesity. *This judgment of your pet's weight status should be confirmed by a veterinarian.* Our veterinarians can rule out other medical conditions that might look like obesity. It is important to confirm that your pet really is overweight and not showing signs of an underlying illness.

#### **Health Risks Associated with Obesity**

Obese dogs and cats have a higher incidence of skeletal and cardiac problems, diabetes, and risks associated with anesthesia and surgery. Most studies in human beings and animals support the concept that obesity shortens life.

#### **Causes**

There are many factors that contribute to the development of obesity, over which we have little control. These include heredity, breed type, sex and age. However, there are factors we can control and it's important that we're aware of these. Factors involved in the development of obesity include early overfeeding and physical inactivity.

Reduced physical activity or exercise that is not matched by reduction in the calories eaten contributes to obesity, as does eating when bored or idle. Overfeeding puppies and kittens predisposes them to obesity as adults by increasing their number of fat cells. Allowing them to become obese during growth will often plague them with obesity throughout life. There are also certain medical conditions that will cause pets to be overweight. It may be necessary to perform blood tests on your pet to make sure the excessive weight is not due to an underlying medical condition.

#### **Treatment**

The treatment of uncomplicated obesity is to reduce the caloric intake while increasing the energy output. This can best be accomplished by feeding a high-fiber, low fat, less calorie-dense diet. By using this approach, the pet can continue to eat approximately the same volume as usual and achieve a comforting sense of fullness. It is important to set goals for progress, require periodic weigh-ins, and determine how much time the desired weight loss should require.

After a successful weight loss has been obtained, periodic checkups should assist in maintaining the proper body weight. Weight loss will improve the animal's enjoyment and length of life. Exercise may be inappropriate for pets in poor health, so be sure to follow the veterinarian's recommendations.

#### **Home Management**

By far the most important part of a successful weight reduction program is that every member of the family is participating. Your total commitment to achieving the weight loss is necessary; otherwise the effort may result in frustration, wasted time, energy and resources. It's essential that everyone cooperate to reach the agreed upon goal. Divide the total amount fed per day into as many as three or four meals. Keep the pet out of the room when our food is prepared or eaten. This helps eliminate begging and feeding of snacks. Remember that seemingly small treats add up when given frequently. Try giving cheerios or veggies instead.

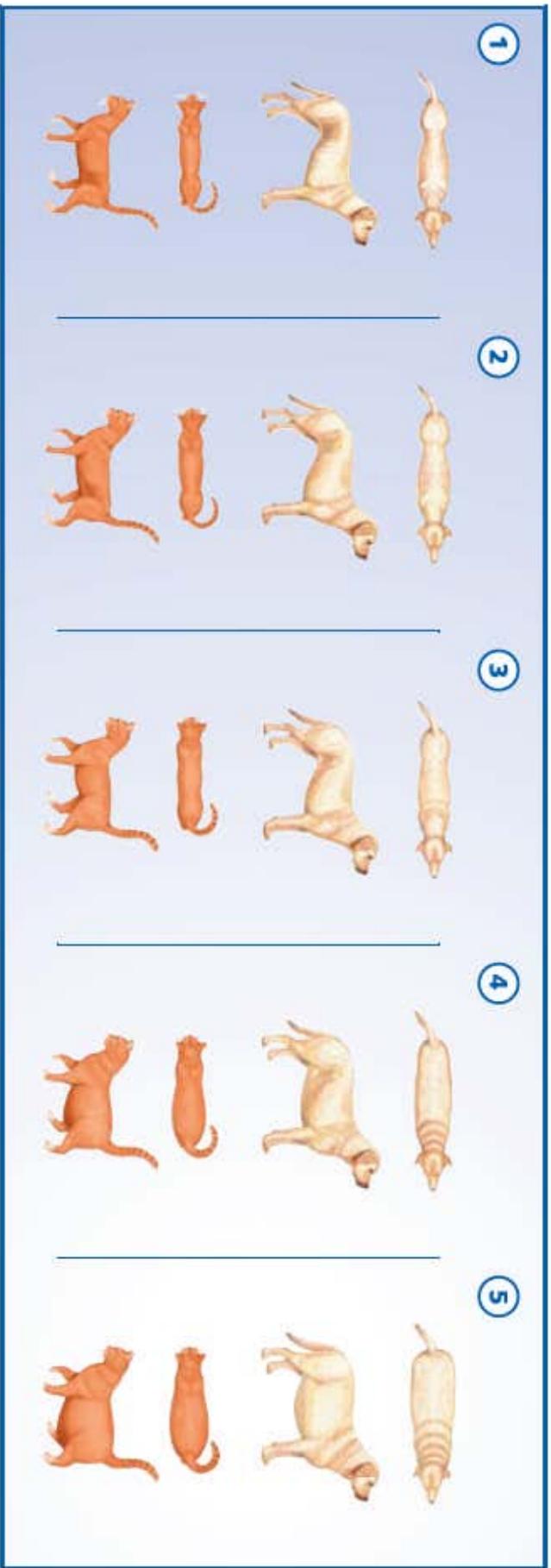
#### **Diet Recommendations**

Talk to our doctors for specific diet and exercise recommendations. Some topics to discuss with our veterinarians will be appropriate types of food, the quantity of food to give per day, and ideal exercises for your pet.



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# SELECT A BODY CONDITION SCORE FOR YOUR PET



1

2

3

4

5

**VERY THIN**

**UNDERWEIGHT**

**IDEAL**

**OVERWEIGHT**

**OBESE**

**RIBS** - Easily felt with no fat cover  
**TAIL BASE** - Bones are ribbed, no fat cover  
**SIDE VIEW** - Severe abdominal tuck  
**OVERHEAD VIEW** - Accentuated hourglass shape

**RIBS** - Easily felt with little fat cover  
**TAIL BASE** - Bones are visible with slight fat cover  
**SIDE VIEW** - Abdominal tuck  
**OVERHEAD VIEW** - Ankleed hourglass shape

**RIBS** - Easily felt with slight fat cover  
**TAIL BASE** - Smooth contour with slight fat cover  
**SIDE VIEW** - Abdominal tuck  
**OVERHEAD VIEW** - Well-proportioned waist

**RIBS** - Difficult to feel under moderate fat cover  
**TAIL BASE** - Some thickening, bones palpable under moderate fat cover  
**SIDE VIEW** - No abdominal tuck  
**OVERHEAD VIEW** - Back is slightly broadened at waist

**RIBS** - Difficult to feel under thick fat cover  
**TAIL BASE** - Thickened and difficult to feel under thick fat cover  
**SIDE VIEW** - No waist, fat hangs from abdomen  
**OVERHEAD VIEW** - Back is markedly broadened