

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Silent Epidemic Affecting Our Pets by M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

Veterinarians estimate that more than 88 million pets are far too heavy and this tendency towards chubbiness is causing injuries, illnesses and even shortening life spans. Unfortunately, there is a serious disconnection between what veterinarians tell owners and what the owners see in their pets. The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) surveys veterinarians and owners each year to find just how overweight our pets are. Recent surveys have shown that 53% of dogs and 55% of cats are classified as overweight or obese by their veterinarians, but 15 to 22% of owners see those same pets as normal weight! In the words of APOP founder, Dr. Ernie Ward, pet owners have now normalized obesity and made fat pets the new normal.

What's even worse is that despite veterinarians' warnings, the numbers of fat pets continues to grow. In recent years, pets classified as obese (greater than 30% above normal body weight) have increased after each survey. This means that more and more pets are at higher risk for a variety of weight related problems.

Carrying excess pounds can cause pets to develop breathing problems, kidney disease and aggravate arthritis. Cats are extremely prone to acquiring Type 2 diabetes when they are overweight and any anesthetic procedure for your pet is automatically more of a risk because of increased body fat. Above all, excess weight will shorten a pet's lifespan. A landmark study has shown that pets who intake a limited amount of calories actually live almost two years longer than pets without calorie restriction.

Pet owners are the major gateway to both preventing our pets from becoming obese and in helping them lose the excess fat. After all, it's the owner who controls the pet's access to all foods! Involve your whole family in the pet's weight loss process. Assign one person to be the pet's primary feeder and make sure that no one else in the family is providing non-approved treats or snacks on the side. It may not seem like much, but even a couple of dog biscuits each day can add an extra 50-100 calories. That's almost 25% of a small dog's total daily requirement!

You may need to change your pet's feeding schedule too. Most pet owners leave food out for their pets all day (free choice feeding) or they only feed a large amount once a day: both practices often lead to obesity. By feeding the right amount twice or even three times a day, you can actually help your pet lose more weight. Your veterinarian may prescribe a special veterinary weight loss diet, as well.

Increasing your pet's exercise is also a crucial component to weight loss. Once your veterinarian gives the okay, try to work up to two 20 minute walks per day or even one hour long walk. The extra benefit is the positive effects on your health also!

For cats use kitty toys to encourage play and movement. Teasers on strings and even laser pointers can keep your cat moving and a couple of twenty minute sessions each day will help your feline burn more calories. Once you have started the process, your veterinarian will want to see you for regular weigh-ins and consultations to make sure you are meeting goals and adjusting as needed.

This is a serious issue and has proven effect on longevity. We all want our pets to be with us for as long as possible, so helping them lose excess weight is just one way we can help make that happen!

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.