

Park Plaza Animal Hospital

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WEIGHT MANAGEMENT FOR CATS

Weight management is a very common problem, affecting as many as 30% of cats. Overweight animals can experience some significant health risks:

- Difficulty obtaining a thorough physical exam
- Impaired breathing and heart function
- Stress on joints leading to arthritis or other orthopedic problems
- Skin irritation or infection
- Increased risks with anesthesia or surgical procedures
- Increased resistance to insulin in diabetic patients

Overweight cats are especially susceptible to a potentially fatal liver disease called hepatic lipidosis (“fatty liver disease”).

Three steps to tell if your pet needs weight management:

1. Place your hands on each side of the chest and attempt to feel the ribs. If the ribs can be easily felt, your pet is in good body condition. If you have to push to find or feel the ribs, a layer of fat is probably obscuring them.
2. The abdomen of normal cats should be tucked up when viewed from the side.
3. Cats should have a waist when viewed from above.

Cats often develop large fat pads on the abdominal wall between the hind legs that are sometimes confused by owners for tumors.

While weight management problems can result from metabolic disease, more often the cause is that the animal is taking in more calories than they burn. Successful weight management requires a combination of diet and exercise. It is important to remember that the cat did not gain the weight in a short period of time so it is unrealistic to expect him or her to lose it all quickly.

Diet: Many commercial foods are available that restrict calories and may be recommended for different situations. Reduced calorie diets should be gradually introduced to the cat by mixing it with the normal food for one or two weeks. This slow transition helps the pet to adjust to the new diet without going off food, which can be particularly dangerous in cats. Weight management is more successful if the cat’s daily food ration is divided into two to four meals rather than feeding free choice or only once a day. The dieting animal should be fed separately from other pets and not allowed access to anyone else’s food. If the cat begs between meals a few pieces of dry kibble can be used for snacks.

Snacks and treats are frequently a part of the weight management problem. Fatty, salty, or high calorie snacks need to be traded for healthier choices, such as fruit, vegetables, or dry kibble

pieces. Snacks should make up less than 10% of the cat's total daily calories. The last pages of this handout list different foods, snacks, and their calorie content.

Exercise: Activity is essential for a weight management program. Please don't try to vigorously exercise an overweight, out-of-condition pet! Instead, once some weight has been lost, begin with light activity like chasing toys or even short leash walks.

Sustained weight management requires a change in your relationship with your dog. Instead of food-centered attention, substitute play time, teaching tricks, or other activities.

Chart your success! Weigh your pet every two to three weeks and plot the weight on a graph. This will also alert you if there are problems in your weight management plan.

The benefits of all your hard work include improved health and life expectancy, making the effort worthwhile!