

Cat Food: Weight Control FAQs

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FAQs

cat weight control

Obesity is the number one nutritional problem in dogs and cats. It is unhealthy for pets and can lead to serious medical problems such as diabetes mellitus, lameness, and even premature death. Prevention is the best way to avoid medical problems due to obesity. There are ways to help your overweight pet return to a more healthy weight, with diet being an important factor.

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Why is my pet overweight?

Although most weight gain in pets, like humans, is simply due to feeding too much or exercising too little, there may be treatable medical conditions contributing to obesity. Disease, genetics, medications, and other nondietary factors can all influence your cat's weight. If your pet has an unexplained increase in appetite or weight, have her examined by your veterinarian to rule out possible medical conditions.

Also, always have your pet checked by your veterinarian before starting any weight loss program.

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Why did my pet gain weight when I fed according to the manufacturer's recommendations?

The label recommendations provide guidelines based on caloric needs of what the manufacturer considers to be an "average" dog or cat with "average" activity. Often, many pets will gain excess weight if fed what pet food manufacturers suggest.

It is a good idea to start at the low end of the suggested amount, monitor your pet's weight for several weeks, then adjust the amount fed accordingly.

Also consider what else your pet may eat. If your pet typically gets table scraps, treats, and a "little something to make the food taste better," these are other reasons your pet is gaining excess weight. The calories in "little extras" add up very quickly. [\[Back to Top \]](#)



Do I have to use a reducing diet if my pet is supposed to lose weight?

Your veterinarian will be able to give you the best advice on what diet you should feed your pet. Some pets, such as those who do not have to lose a large amount of weight, will do fine on a lesser amount of their normal food. Pets who are on a special diet because of another condition (e.g., bladder stones) should remain on that diet and simply be fed less of it. A balanced commercial weight reduction diet, however, does offer several advantages.

First, weight reduction diets generally have less fat and more fiber, resulting in a food that is less energy dense. This allows for a greater loss of body fat than simply feeding smaller amounts of a high-fat diet. This is because fat contains over twice as many calories as protein and carbohydrates, and the less energy dense foods tend to produce satiety (a feeling of being full) at a lower level of calorie intake. In addition, more energy is used in digesting and absorbing lower-fat, higher-fiber diets. Finally, weight reduction diets contain the proper amount of vitamins and minerals per serving size. By feeding less of your pet's regular food, you are also decreasing the level of protein, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients your pet receives. These differences could be eliminated by using supplements, but using a [food more specifically balanced for weight loss](#) requires less guess work. [\[Back to Top \]](#)



How fast should my pet lose weight?

It is especially important that obese cats do not lose weight too rapidly, so a goal of 1% of body weight per week may be better. If changing diets as part of a weight loss program, it is important to change diets gradually over the course of 1-2 weeks. Cats, especially, should not be allowed to quit eating while on a weight loss program.

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When is my pet most likely to develop a weight problem?

Most weight problems develop slowly and often begin when a pet transitions from a growing kitten to an adult. Neutered and spayed pets have less energy needs, and this should be taken into account after the surgery by decreasing the amount fed. An adult pet's appetite is often greater than his need. Pets can also experience weight gain during the senior years when activity level decreases. For some pets, activity also decreases during the winter months. Be ready to adjust your pet's calories and perform periodic weight checks to avoid overfeeding during these problematic transition times.

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Why aren't there fat-free pet foods?

Consuming excessive amounts of fat has been shown to cause health problems in both animals and humans. However, fat is an essential nutrient required for good health. Even pets on a calorie-restricted diet need some fat. Without fat in the diet, your pet would soon become deficient in certain vitamins, essential fatty acids, and other nutrients.

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How do I tell if my cat is overweight?

A 9-point body condition scoring system has been developed for cats. Consider the following five indicators on your cat and compare them to the body condition scores below.

First, feel for your cat's ribs. You should be able to feel the ribs quite easily. There should be a slight amount of fat over them, but each rib should be distinct. If you can see the ribs, your cat is too thin. If you cannot feel them at all, your cat is very overweight.

Second, check the area near the base of your cat's tail. There should be a small amount of fat covering this area and it should feel smooth overall. If the bones protrude, your cat is too thin; if you cannot feel any bones at all, your cat is very overweight.

Third, feel other bony prominences on the cat's body such as the spine, shoulders, and hips. Again, you should be able to feel a small amount of fat over these areas. If these bones are easily felt or visible, your cat is too thin. If you cannot feel the bones beneath the layer of fat, your cat is obviously overweight.

Fourth, look at your cat from above. Your cat should have a definite waist behind the ribs. If the waist is extreme or if bony prominences are visible, your cat is too thin. If there is no waist, or worse yet, the area between the ribs and hips is wider than the hips or ribs, your cat is grossly overweight.

Fifth, look at your cat from the side. Cats should have an abdominal tuck (the area behind the ribs should be smaller in diameter than the chest). A cat who is too thin will have a very severe abdominal tuck. Overweight cats will have no abdominal tuck. Some cats with ideal body scores may still have pendulous (udder-like) skin on their lower abdomens. This area is also a common site for fat deposition. If you're unsure about your cat, ask your veterinarian.

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WHAT IS YOUR CAT'S BODY SCORE?

Veterinarians often use a 9-point scoring system to evaluate the body condition of pets. A point value of 1 means the cat is extremely thin to the point of emaciation. A score of 9 means the pet is grossly overweight. A score of 5 is 'just right.' To determine body score, your veterinarian considers the following areas of a cat: the ribs, the base of the tail, and the spine/shoulders/hips. The cat is looked at from above and from a side profile.

