

# Obesity in Dogs - Is It Illness?

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



We are an overweight society and our pets are no different. By far the most common explanation for an overweight pet is simple: lack of exercise and too much to eat. But what if you feed your dog sensibly and exercise adequately and your dog still has a weight problem?

There could be a number of reasons your dog is still overweight, including genetics, temperament, and overall activity level. It could also be an indication of a disease that can cause your dog to be or to appear overweight. Conditions that can cause some of this include diseases affecting the hormones, like hypothyroidism and Cushing's Disease (or Cushing's Syndrome).

**HYPOTHYROIDISM**, or decreased production of thyroid hormone, causes alterations in cellular metabolism and, as a result, affects the entire body. The dog may not feel like exercising and may gain weight because calories consumed are not matching calories expended, then the dog feels even less like exercising because of the weight gain. Hypothyroidism is usually inherited and a common genetic illness in dogs. Untreated hypothyroidism means a lower quality of life for your dog, but with the right medication, this condition can be controlled and your dog can enjoy a good quality of life.

**CUSHING'S DISEASE** (hyperadrenocorticism) is a condition that results from the chronic overproduction of the glucocorticoid hormone. This hormone is essential for processes in the body such as blood glucose levels, fat metabolism, and major organ function. There are different types of Cushing's disease with many symptoms and its onset is slow, so symptoms are often mistaken for signs of aging. It can cause reduced activity, change in appetite, and hair loss. Other symptoms include an increased thirst and urination, muscle weakness, and the appearance of being overweight. Treatment depends on the type and cause as well as the overall health of the dog. In many cases, it is treated with medication. Adequate exercise and proper diet are essential for all canines, but if your dog is overweight, and you suspect something else, see your veterinarian for a thorough exam including blood tests and other tests.

## DIET AND EXERCISE

Exercise has many benefits. It not only helps to burn calories but it also:

- Helps get oxygen to tissue cells
  - Strengthens respiratory and circulatory systems
  - Keeps muscles toned and joints flexible
  - Releases energy, relieves boredom, and keeps mind active
- Try toys like the [Flying Disc](#) to help keep your dog active outdoors.

Along with exercise your dog has specific dietary needs that will differ during his various life

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...when using the various life stages. Younger animals require more energy, protein, and minerals than older dogs. Active field trial dogs and dogs who are outside in cooler weather also have greater energy needs. Pregnant or nursing dogs require increased protein, minerals, and energy. "Couch potato" dogs, however, have much lower energy needs. Older dogs, even if they remain active, may require fewer calories than when they were younger. Try foods like our [Signature Series dog foods](#) formulated for each stage in your dog's life.