

Weight Management is Critical to a Dog's Health

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Weight management is a critical element of good health for all canines. However, studies show that nearly half of the national canine population struggles with obesity. Those are dangerous odds for those canines also affected with osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease) because of the negative impact the additional weight has on their degenerated joints. Therefore, it is imperative that pet owners manage their arthritic dog's weight to prevent further damage to the joints.

ARTHRITIS IS A DEBILITATING CONDITION MOST OFTEN SEEN IN AGING PETS.

This condition is characterized by the deterioration, or loss, in advanced cases, of the protective articular cartilage that covers the end of the bones in a synovial (moving) joint. When this soft tissue degenerates, the bones in the articulation point of the joint are exposed and can rub together to cause pain, inflammation, and bone damage. Dogs that are dealing with arthritis may be more reluctant to go for walks, have difficulty climbing stairs, show changes to their gait, or appear stiff and withdrawn.

WEIGH THE RISKS

Dogs that are obese or overweight are not only at higher risk for arthritis but will also suffer increasingly more from its ill effects. Extra weight increases the stress on the joint's cartilage, causing more pain and promoting a greater chance of further damage.

If you are unsure whether your dog is within an acceptable body weight range, talk to your veterinarian, who can help you determine your pet's overall health. One test your veterinarian may perform is a body condition score, which can determine whether your canine falls within the parameters that constitute a healthy body (ribs easily felt,

tucked abdomen, waist visible from above) or if your dog is overweight (fat covering ribs, abdominal distention).

THE SOLUTION BEGINS AT HOME

To give your pet the best possible care when dealing with arthritis it is crucial that you as a pet owner take responsibility in managing their weight. Not only will this reduce the impact on the already degenerated joints, but it will also improve the ease and success of surgery if that becomes a necessity down the line.

At home, implement a two-part process to assist your arthritic pet in dealing with weight. Reduce caloric intake and examine your current feeding options to determine whether they are providing your dog with a [balanced diet](#). Daily and consistent exercise that provides a full range of motion without causing further damage to joints is also crucial.