Dog Weight Control FAQs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

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 (sugar diabetes), 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.

- Why is my pet overweight?
- Why did my pet gain weight when I fed according to the manufacturer's recommendations?
- Do I have to use a reducing diet if my pet is supposed to lose weight?
- How fast should my pet lose weight?
- When is my pet most likely to develop a weight problem?
- Why aren't there fat-free pet foods?
- How do I tell if my dog is overweight?
- How can Drs. Foster & Smith Chicken & Brown Rice Formula Adult Lite Dog Food help my dog to lose weight?
- What is L-Carnitine? Why is it added to some lite dog foods such as Drs. Foster & Smith Chicken & Brown Rice Formula Adult Lite Dog Food?

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 dog'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. [Back to Top]

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

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, may 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?

In general, a good goal for dog weight loss is 0.5-2.0% of his body weight per week. For example, a 50-pound dog should lose ¼ to 1 pound per week. A weight loss of 2% or more per week can cause more harm than good.
[Back to Top]

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 puppy or 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.
[Back to Top]

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

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.

[Back to Top]

How do I tell if my dog is overweight?

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

First, feel for your dog'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 dog is too thin. If you cannot feel them at all, your dog is very overweight.

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

Third, feel other bony prominences on the dog'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 dog is too thin. If you cannot feel the bones beneath the layer of fat, your dog is obviously overweight.

Fourth, look at your dog from above. (If your dog has long hair, it may be easier and more accurate to check your dog when he is wet-after a bath or a swim.) Your dog should have a definite waist behind the ribs. If the waist is extreme or if bony prominences are visible, your dog 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 dog is grossly overweight.

Fifth, look at your dog from the side. Dogs should have an abdominal tuck, i.e., the area behind the ribs should be smaller in diameter than the chest. This can vary a lot between breeds. Some dog breeds such as Irish Setters and Greyhounds, for instance, appear to have a much more distinct abdominal tuck, since they are so deep-chested. A dog who is too thin will have a very severe abdominal tuck. Overweight dogs will have no abdominal tuck.

[Back to Top]

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

How can Drs. Foster & Smith Chicken & Brown Rice Formula Adult Lite Dog Food help my dog to lose weight?

This food contains cellulose and beet pulp to provide higher levels of fiber, and has reduced calorie levels to help your dog lose weight without feeling deprived. L-Carnitine is thought to increase lean body mass and decrease fat. This is helpful during weight loss, when we want pets to lose fat but retain lean muscle.

[Back to Top]

What is L-Carnitine? Why is it added to some lite dog foods such as Drs. Foster & Smith Chicken & Brown Rice Formula Adult Lite Dog Food?

L-Carnitine is an amino acid derivative that may help to increase lean body mass and decrease fat. This can be helpful during weight loss, when we want pets to lose fat but retain lean muscle.

[Back to Top]

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*