

Obesity in Pets

One of the common questions asked at our clinic is “what can I do to extend my pets life”. While there are several things that pet owners can do, one of the more significant, inexpensive and overlooked answers is maintaining a healthy weight.

A recent study has proven a direct link between obesity and longevity. Simply stated: Thinner dogs and cats live longer. There are several reasons pets gain weight and some can be attributed to medical reasons. Hypothyroidism is one example. However, it is more common for pets to be overweight because they consume more calories than they use. A small treat for us, might add up to a lot of calories for a small animal

In certain breeds, overweight can cause specific vertebral problems. When we see a dog such as a dachhound, we can predict he will be candidate for disc disease if he is overweight.

Unfortunately, canine obesity is on the rise. On average, 25% to 40% of pets in the United States are overweight or obese. In the older pet, 40% of all dogs 6 to 10 years of age are overweight. Overweight is considered to be 5-19% over ideal weight and obese if it is over 20%

The cause of obesity in dogs can be attributed to the following:

- 1. Medical Conditions**
- 2. Breed inherited predispositions**
- 3. Consistant overconsumtiom of energy**
- 4. Not getting enough exercise**
- 5. A combination of the above**

Our major concern has nothing to do with cosmetics. Most dogs are precious because of their personalities and the contributions they make to our quality of life. However, it

has been associated with several conditions in pets in addition to those discussed above. We know overweight contributes to cardiovascular disease, glucose metabolism (diabetes) and skin conditions.

We are learning more about the link between overweight and the development of osteoarthritis in dogs. This is a significant orthopedic condition .

Osteoarthritis occurs when the balance between the creation and degradation of joint structures is disturbed. One theory is that extraweight creates additional stress on joints which contributes to the degradation of the cartilage. This is one of the common disease entities we treat every week and causes a diminished quality of life. When considering arthritis in your pet, remember these important points.

- 1. Arthritis is a chronic, progressive, incurable disease.**
- 2. Signs of arthritis can be subtle**
- 3. Extra weight can increase the chance of arthritis**
- 4. Weight loss can improve lameness associated with arthritis.**

There are several other things we employ in treating arthritis such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for pain and to decrease inflammation. However, weight loss is another cornerstone for a longer life and one with a high standard for quality.

The good news is that we have several methods to help resolve the problems associated with overweight. Some medical tests can define abnormal metabolism or endocrine imbalance. There are several diet recommendations that work well and there has been a medication recently introduced to assist in a weight loss program.