

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



THE OVERWEIGHT CAT



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Like modern man, cats today eat better food and take less exercise than their predecessors. Just as in people there is a risk that your cat may become overweight.

Is my cat obese?

It is often difficult for us to see that our own pet is overweight. Look at your cat from above – can you see a narrowing of the body behind the ribcage (a ‘waist’)? Does your pet have a bit of a paunch? There should be a visible ‘tucking-in’ of the tummy just in front of the hindquarters. Run your hand gently over your cat’s backbone and ribs. You should be able to feel the bones without pressing hard. If you cannot then your cat is overweight – and is at risk of illness as a result.



My cat hardly eats anything – how can it be fat?

Many overweight animals do not eat very much – a little food can keep an animal fat. If your cat is overweight it means that it was eating more than it needed at some time in its life. It is extremely rare for hormone problems to cause obesity in cats.

Surely it doesn't matter if my cat is fat?

Obesity makes it more likely that your cat will suffer from some medical conditions, especially diabetes and kidney disease.

How can I help my cat lose weight?

Reduce the daily calories that your pet is eating. Increasing exercise alone is not enough. Think about what your cat eats in a day. If you have other pets your cat may be helping itself from their bowls. Studies have shown that cats that have food down all the time, especially dry food or 'biscuits', tend to be fatter. It may be better to stop dry food altogether, or at least to change to a low calorie one. You can 'diet' your pet by cutting its daily food allowance to an amount less than that required for its ideal body weight, but success is more likely using a special low calorie diet from the vet. These are higher in fibre and lower in fat, so the amount of food looks greater and fills your pet up more.

The number of meals per day is not important – but the TOTAL amount fed is. Feeding your pet smaller meals more often may help to reduce hunger during weight loss. Look on the side of the packet or tin of low calorie foods to see how much to feed – remember that this is based on TARGET (slim) weight. Estimate this by reducing your pet's current weight by 15 per cent – that's 0.75kg (1.5lb) for a 5kg (11lb) cat. This should be lost over a 15 week period. Weigh your cat monthly (weigh a cat carrier first, then put your pet in, weigh again and deduct the weight of the basket). If weight is not coming off, you need to reduce the food further. No two pets are the same, so no one can say how much any animal should be fed. The only way to tell is to check the weight regularly and adjust the food accordingly.

Weight reduction in cats

Current weight in pounds	Target for weight reduction over 4wks	Target for weight reduction over 12wks
3	0.12	0.36
3.5	0.14	0.42
4	0.16	0.48
4.5	0.18	0.54
5	0.2	0.6
5.5	0.22	0.66
6	0.24	0.72
6.5	0.26	0.78
7.0	0.28	0.84
7.5	0.3	0.90
8.0	0.32	0.96

'Crash' diets and starvation are dangerous to cats, as they may cause liver damage. This is more usually a problem in a fat cat which loses its appetite owing to illness. However, sometimes cats can be reluctant to eat low calorie diets. Try reducing the amount of food given for a couple of days before introducing the new diet. Mix the new food in with a small amount of the old for the first few days.

What about treats?

Don't think FOOD = LOVE. Play with your pet – string, catnip toys or a ping-pong ball, or groom it instead. Shut your pet out when you are eating. If your cat is visiting the neighbours for food, tell them about the diet. Sometimes you may have to put a collar on your cat with 'Don't feed me' written on it in large letters.

How do I know my cat is losing weight?

Your vet will weigh your cat for you and suggest how much food to start with. Many veterinary practices offer 'weight watcher' clinics where you take your cat along at regular intervals to be weighed and discuss progress.

My cat has reached its target weight – what now?

Once your cat has reached its target weight, think of it as a new beginning, with your cat happier and healthier. Don't go back to old habits or the weight will creep back on. But increase food intake slightly (start with ten per cent or 1/10th) to prevent weight loss continuing. Weigh your pet every month or two to check.

Knowing the right amount to feed can be hard. All cats are different and so it is impossible to recommend a single diet plan for all.



Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



This leaflet was produced in association with Vetstream Ltd

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Registered charity no: 224392

Photography: John Henderson • Indusfoto