



Nutritional Helpline

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Right Weight Record Card

Obesity is becoming more of a problem in the canine world, just as it is for humans and this is something that we, as responsible dog owners, need to be aware of. It is thought that up to 20-34% of dogs in the UK are overweight and this number seems to be on the increase.

What is obesity?

Obesity can be defined as a body weight which exceeds the dog's ideal body weight by 15-20% or more accurately when body fat content exceeds 35-45%. Obesity occurs when there is an imbalance between energy (calorie) intake and energy expenditure over a period of time. Put simply, food provides energy, or calories, which the dog requires for activity. Obesity occurs when the number of calories that the dog consumes is higher than the number of calories he is using up on a daily basis. These excess calories are stored in the dog's body as fat, which results in weight gain and a change in his body shape.

Why does it occur? Obesity can occur for a number of reasons including:

- Age - older dogs tend to become less active as they age, meaning that they require less energy on a daily basis. If we as owners don't adjust their feed accordingly they can become overweight.
- Arthritis and mobility problems – the pain of this type of condition can often lead to the dog moving around less and therefore using less energy.
- Less active lifestyle – we as humans are tending to have less active lifestyles, perhaps driving our children to school rather than walking, which mean that our dogs also get less exercise.
- Overfeeding – it can be easy to feed more than is recommended of highly palatable, energy dense foods or a few too many treats and table scraps, which can all contribute excess calories.

Long term effects.

Obviously it is not healthy for dogs to remain overweight for any length of time as it can have serious effects on their general well being. There are several conditions that the dog can suffer from or can be made worse as a result of being overweight for a period of time and these include:

- Osteoarthritis – being overweight puts more pressure on bones and joints which can exacerbate this condition, particularly in older dogs.
- Heart disease – being overweight increases the dog's susceptibility to heart problems, just as it does for us.
- Diabetes – again just as in humans, overweight dogs are more likely to become insulin resistant and therefore suffer from diabetes as a result of this.
- Shortened lifespan - research has shown that overweight dogs don't tend to live as long as their leaner counterparts.

The importance of exercise.

Just as the amount of calories that your dog consumes each day has a significant influence over his body condition, the amount of exercise that he does is equally as important. Adequate exercise is a key aspect of a fit and healthy lifestyle for your dog, so he should already be getting regular exercise every day. However if your dog is overweight, you should look at gradually increasing the amount of exercise that he does on a daily basis as this helps to use up those excess calories. Even playing in the garden with a ball for an extra 10 minutes will help! You can take your dog out with you when you go for a walk or jog and also get involved in activities such as agility and flyball, which not only help keep your dog fit and active but are also beneficial for you too!

Exercise alone however will not completely control weight change, you must adjust the amount fed.

Why not walk your dog in style with an exclusive Chudleys lead, as featured on the front of this leaflet. You can purchase a Chudleys lead from our online store, just visit www.chudleys.co.uk

How do I know if my dog is overweight?

Weighing your dog can be very difficult as it may not be convenient to visit your vet on a frequent basis to use the practice scales and your dog may not always be willing or is perhaps too big to sit on your bathroom scales! For those of you with a smaller breed of dog, you can check your dog's weight by standing on the scales whilst holding him and then subtracting your own weight from your combined weight, although this obviously would not be practical if you own a Great Dane!

Dogs come in all shapes and sizes, with a lot of variation even within the same breed, so some dogs will be naturally leaner than others, for example. However one method of assessing body condition that can be applied to all canines would be the Body Condition Score method.

This involves running your hands across his body and assessing the amount of fat coverage he has – the condition score chart inside shows the ideal body condition and variations either side of that, irrespective of the actual weight. It is much more about fat coverage and body fat content than absolute weight when it comes to keeping your dog fit and in good condition.

Ideally you should be able to run your hands across your dog's side and be able to feel his ribs easily without being able to see them, and he should have a clearly discernable waistline. You should assess and record your dog's Body Condition Score on a regular basis, perhaps weekly, to allow you to monitor his progress on a long term basis.

