

## Obesity in Dogs

Is Fido a little on the heavy-side?

Overweight or obese dogs are prone to increased health problems, including:

- Heart, respiratory, and digestive impairment.
- Slower healing process.
- Poor resistance to viral and bacterial infections.
- Aggravated orthopedic conditions.
- Skin irritations and disease caused by friction within fatty rolls of skin.
- For females, greater likelihood of complications during whelping.



If your dog is carrying excessive weight, he can be difficult for your veterinarian to examine properly and less likely to withstand anesthesia and surgery.

Your dog may look absolutely fine, but that doesn't mean he's not carrying extra weight. You'd be surprised how much bulk can go unnoticed when spread out over a big-bodied or large-boned dog and how effectively fat can hide under a full coat of fur.

To find out if your dog is overweight, feel their ribcage. If you can readily feel his ribs by pressing lightly against them but the ribs are not visible, your dog is in good shape. But if you can't feel the ribs easily, it is time to take your dog to the vet and get him on a diet.

A more quantitative way to find out if your dog is overweight is by the numbers. An overweight dog will most likely be from 10% to 15% over the recommended "ideal" weight for his breed. But this definition is not as simple as it sounds. Any "ideal" weight will vary based on sex (females are generally 10% lighter than males), bone structure, and overall size. Also, "ideal" weights are established for only a selected group of purebreds; most breed standards do not specify an optimal weight. And there are absolutely no established standards for crossbreeds. Ask your veterinarian for help in determining whether your dog is obese.

The cause of excessive weight (other than medical conditions like hypothyroidism) is when your dog consumes more calories than he burns. When increased exercise is not feasible, less calories need to be consumed, i.e. less food or diet food. When light food does not give the desired results, ask your veterinarian for advice.

When you put your pet on a diet, feed him the same amount you are currently feeding, but substitute a diet food. Weigh your dog monthly. A pound or two per month weight loss is a good rate. If that doesn't work, feed the dog 20% less than usual at each meal for a few months. Note: Never make a dog less than 18 months of age go on a diet unless you consult the veterinarian first - it is still growing internally and damage to the bones may occur.