

It's about quality of life

Just as with humans, the number of pets showing signs of obesity is increasing. Obesity can be defined as an excess of body fat that is enough to impair health, welfare and quality of life, explains Veterinary Surgeon **Bruce Waddell**, of Willows Veterinary Group

The vast majority of pet obesity is caused by either pets eating too much, eating the wrong sort of food and/or not exercising enough. A smaller number of cases can be disease related.

Often the weight builds up slowly and goes un-noticed by the owner.

Regular weighing and recording is the only way to get an accurate overview of whether a pet is creeping up from their ideal weight.

Several factors make obesity more likely in pets, eg for dogs:

- Breed – certain breeds have a higher risk.
- Age – the risk increases with age.
- Neuter status – neutered dogs are more at risk.
- Sex – apart from older dogs, obesity is reported to be more common in females.

Owners should be concerned about their pet's weight as obesity can affect the wellbeing of the animal and lead to increased visits to the vet, which will have financial implications for the owner.

Obesity can lead to diabetes, heart disease, respiratory disease, high blood pressure and cancer. It can also reduce mobility and aggravate pre-existing mobility conditions such as arthritis.

To determine whether a dog or cat is overweight a technique called body condition scoring is used. Most veterinary

practices will do this free for clients.

If a pet is the correct weight, the owner:

- should be able to see and feel the outline of your pet's ribs without excess fat covering;
- should be able to see and feel your pet's waist and it should be clearly visible when viewed from above;
- should see the pet's belly is tucked up when viewed from the side.

Owners find it very hard to refuse slipping their pet a titbit from the table and most owners do not realise the harm that prolonged feeding of titbits is doing over time.

There is also a lot of ignorance about which foods are harmful and also how much to feed each day. For example, a 30g piece of ham is a staggering 123% over an average cat's daily recommended energy intake, and a rawhide bone chew is 67% over a 20kg dog's daily recommended energy intake.

Obesity can be managed by exercise and diet. As with anything, owners are advised to start off slowly

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and gradually introduce more exercise. New diets should be introduced gradually to avoid stomach upsets, slowly increasing the levels of the new diet so that after five to seven days the pet is solely on the new diet.

There is a bewildering choice of diets available and it is often difficult for owners to separate good marketing from clinical evidence.



It is also important that dog owners take the size of their dog into consideration – a single product is unlikely to suit both a small breed and a large breed dog.

The pet food industry is massive and many of the producers invest heavily in scientific research to produce foods that are low in calories but have the ability to leave the pet feeling full and give the animal all the nutrition they need.

The choice for owners is compounded if their pet suffers from more than one condition ie obesity and arthritis – do they buy a mobility diet or a weight

control diet? Pet obesity continues to be a concern, with vets reporting that up to three-quarters of all pets they see are over their ideal weight.

Pet professionals need to educate and work with owners to help them to provide their pets with optimum nutrition and exercise to maintain ideal weight.

Contact the Willows Vet Group on 01606 723204.

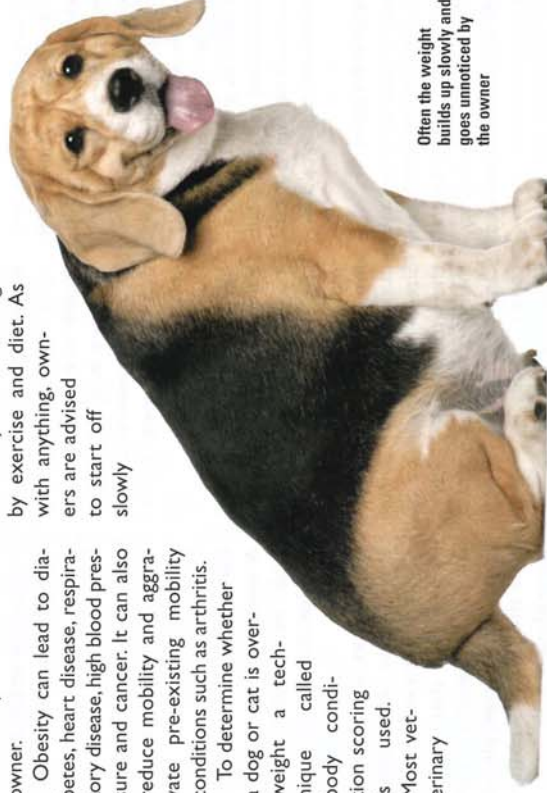


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TIPS FOR SQPS

- 1 Be aware that all dogs are different. The recommended amounts on pet food packaging is a guideline only. Some dogs need more and some need less.
- 2 Any titbits given should be deducted from the regular food portions.
- 3 Owners should be encouraged to weigh food to ensure the correct size portions are given. Using a clear beaker with a marker is an easy way of ensuring the right quantities are given.
- 4 Separate animals at feeding time.



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