Checking in on Your Pet’s Weight

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A variety of foods are available for dogs and cats, each having its own instructions based on recipe and ingredients. It is imperative to review each brand and bag for portion recommendations based on formulation. Remember, recommended portions are based on a baseline metabolic rate, and your pet may need a little more or less to achieve or maintain a lean body condition based on the level of his or her daily activities.

There are many dietary strategies for obese pets to lose an optimum amount of weight. Regardless of which feeding strategy your veterinarian recommends, remember there is no magic button for weight loss. A thorough diet history (which may involve logging everything that is fed for a week) may assist you as you begin weight-loss planning. Your veterinarian may also calculate a daily calorie target based on your pet’s daily activity. A typical plan involves 20% fewer calories than your pet usually consumes to ensure slow and gradual weight loss.

In some cases, weight loss is difficult because of hormonal imbalances or major family lifestyle changes that are impossible to fix. If obesity is becoming life-threatening and a weight-loss program is not working, talk to your veterinarian about pharmaceutical options.

Although this seems like an easy question, breed variations in dogs and cats can make an estimated body condition score, or BCS, difficult. The best tools are your hands; feel along your pet’s body and make sure you can feel the ribs (with mild fat coverage) and a gradual waist. Refer to a body condition scale for diagrams that illustrate this. The ideal BCS is 4/9–5/9, but because every pet is different and can vary in caloric needs, calories may need to be adjusted to achieve an ideal lean weight.

Consult your veterinarian to ensure exercise recommendations are carefully planned before encouraging your pet to exercise. Never encourage exercise if your pet is in pain or has difficulty walking or breathing. Also, note that some breeds should never be forced to overexert. This is even more critical in hot weather.