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Pet weight loss improves mobility, health

Additional pounds can cause joint and ligament issues as well as contribute to other health problems.

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special to the post

In the last several articles we discussed conditioning your pet, caring for joints and helping ease the discomfort of arthritic pets.

Today we'll look at weight loss to increase a pet's mobility and relieve some of the stress on joints and ligaments.

We have lost a sense of normal body condition and the majority of pets are overweight. It is no wonder this has happened.

Our lives are busier than ever, foods have become more palatable, and we are a society that rewards and consoles with food.

It's time to change those habits for both our pets and ourselves.

What is a normal body condition?

In dogs there should be about an eighth of an inch of fat over the ribs. You should be able to clearly feel the spine. There should be a 'waist and a tuck' around the abdomen.

Cats store fat in the inguinal pad and should not have a pouch hanging behind the back legs. They also store fat over their entire body. Your vet office has charts on normal body condition.

Check them out and ask the staff to help you assess the body condition of your pet.

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Why watch your pet's weight? Is it that important?

Yes, it is a huge stress on joints and ligaments and the impact of extra weight extends beyond that.

There is an increased risk of diabetes, pancreatitis, skin problems, cancer, heart disease, viral and bacterial infections, hypertension, respiratory disease and decreased lung capacity.

How do you go about reducing your pet's weight?

Start with a visit to your veterinarian. They will help you determine the proper weight for your pet and will make sure you are dealing with just basic weight gain.

Some types of weight gain may not be fat. There may be fluid in the belly. Or certain patterns of weight gain may suggest Cushings Disease. Or perhaps your pet gained all that weight due to hypothyroidism. Firstly, you need to rule out a medical cause for the weight gain.

Once your pet has been determined to be healthy except for the weight issue, then you can start thinking about weight loss.

Again, this is where your veterinarian and their staff can be very helpful. They can set up a weight loss program for your pet.

What does a weight loss program entail?

Firstly, your vet will determine which of the weight loss diets is best suited to your pet. Weight loss foods fall into two categories – those with increased fibre content and those with increased protein.

Next, the vet or their staff will set out a weight loss plan. How much should you feed?

How much exercise should your pet receive? How much should your pet lose each week?

How long will it take to get to your goal?

And then comes the moments of truth – the weekly weigh-ins. Depending on how your pet is

progressing in his/her weight loss, the recommendations on diet, food volume and exercise may change.

A word of caution with overweight cats – they are much more likely to develop a fatty liver syndrome. This can start within two days of not eating. Cats must eat. Work very closely with your vet when trying to get the extra weight off of your cat.

And remember – your pet did not put the weight on overnight. It's not coming off overnight. You'll be surprised to see the changes in energy, mobility and happiness as your pet reaches a healthy weight.

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