

## Cats and Obesity

**Approximately 25% of companion animals are overweight or obese.**

Obesity can have devastating effects on the skeletal system (arthritis, cranial cruciate ligament tears and ruptures, etc.), as well as stimulate cardiovascular disease and endocrine disorders (diabetes). Fat in the abdomen can make breathing labored. Overweight animals have increased anesthetic complications. Decreased heat tolerance and stamina due to obesity make increasing activity difficult. There is increased incidence of bladder cancer in overweight animals. Overweight cats that stop eating are susceptible to fatty liver (hepatic lipidosis).

The first step in controlling obesity is identifying that it exists in your cat. Cats carry their fat along the lower abdomen, in the abdomen and in the face.

A body condition score (BCS) is used as classification. The scale ranges from 1 to 5. A score of 1 would be a very thin animal with prominent ribs and spine. A score of 2 is an underweight animal with minimal fat cover. A score of 3 is ideal. The ribs can be felt but not seen. There is a slight abdominal tuck (waist). Scores 4 and 5 signify overweight and obese, respectively. The ribs are difficult to feel and no waist can be seen.

Your veterinarian can work with you to develop a weight loss plan for your cat. If your cat is overweight it is critical to monitor the caloric intake he/she receives from their food and the amount of treats and table scraps given. This is especially important when there are many individuals feeding the animal. It may be necessary to designate one person to feed the animal or hang a check-off sheet near the food dish.

Eliminate table scraps and reduce treats. Small amounts of boiled lean beef or chicken can be given occasionally if someone in the house insists on giving the pet people foods.

One myth regarding obesity is that spayed or neutered cats become overweight due to inactivity. Spayed or neutered (altered) felines tend to burn less calories during rest when compared to intact animals due to a decreased resting metabolic rate. The loss of hormones (estrogen and androgens) decreases undesirable behaviors such as roaming and sexual behavior but has no effect on day-to-day activity levels.

With the proper diet and exercise, animals that have been altered can maintain an appropriate weight.

Don't forget about exercise! Play with your cat at least 20 minutes daily.