

Weight Loss Goals for the New Year

Obesity is an important health topic for both humans and pets. It is estimated that roughly 35% of dogs and cats in the United States are overweight. With weight gain comes a multitude of complications similar to people, including excessive pain, respiratory disease and diabetes to name a few.

The overweight animal has extra, unnecessary, stress on all of the joints in the body. This can lead to progression of existing joint disease, creating even more pain. Weight management is actually able to reduce dosing of pain medications in some patients! Also, our obese patients can have a harder time taking deep breaths due to the constriction their excessive fat creates around their chest. This may make them more prone to overheating and more sensitive to stress. On top of that, extra body fat leads to insulin resistance. This makes managing our diabetic patients more complicated and predisposes them to secondary infections. Particularly in cats, weight management is fundamental in decreasing a cat's risk of developing diabetes.

You may wonder, how did my pet get to be overweight when I don't feed him that much? There are a couple factors that may play into this. A "cup of food" depends on the size of the cup. The most accurate way to ensure you are providing your pet with his or her nutritional requirements is to use an actual measuring cup. This way, if you use the package guidelines, you are ensuring the exact amount you are feeding. Most food labels come with a recommended feeding guide indicating how much food should be fed based on weight. But remember, these guidelines are merely a starting point! If your pet is overweight, then you should be reducing the amount of food you're offering or even consider changing foods.

Finally, one of the main reasons we have so many overweight pets is because many people express their love for their pets through treats (myself included!). This can be an important player in the human-animal bond; however, pet treats are high in calories and fat. Sometimes only a couple treats can be the equivalent of a small meal! Well then, simply cut back on the treats, right? This sounds simple, but by itself won't work. Instead, cutting back treats paired with other lifestyle changes are required to encourage healthy weight loss. This may mean feeding a special diet made for weight loss, feeding a measured amount using an appropriate measuring cup, and taking your pet in for regular weigh-ins at the vet's office.

So as we continue our way into 2019, try to keep these pointers in mind the next time you purchase a bag of pet food. The most important thing you can do to ensure an appropriate weight loss journey for your pet is to consult with your veterinary team. Ruling out predisposing health conditions and formulating a weight loss plan for your specific pet are a must for success! Happy New Year!