

Why Obesity Matters

by Debra L. Zoran, DVM, PhD, Diplomate ACVIM-SAIM



What Are the Health Risks?

If your veterinarian has determined that your dog is carrying a few too many extra pounds, you're not alone! It's estimated that about 17 million dogs in the United States are overweight or obese, and those numbers are increasing. Obesity is more than just a problem with your dog's appearance. Obesity is a medical problem that can have serious health consequences. The good news is that weight loss - even in small amounts - can result in a significant improvement in your dog's health and quality of life.

What are the some of the health risks of obesity in dogs?

- **Arthritis** – Joint disease is one of the most common health effects of obesity. The excess weight adds extra strain to joints and ligaments, worsening pain and making it harder to move around. Obese dogs often have trouble going up stairs, getting into cars, or simply going for a walk.
- **Breathing Problems** – Does your dog huff and puff on walks or during playtime? Excess body fat can increase pressure on your dog's lungs and interfere with normal function. When expansion of the lungs is restricted by fat in the chest cavity, the lungs have to work harder to provide oxygen, which can result in shortness of breath.
- **Heart Disease** – Does your dog seem to have less energy? Those extra pounds may be putting a strain on your dog's heart. Obesity can be associated with high blood pressure, or hypertension, in dogs, which, just as in people, can lead to a variety of complications.
- **Increased Risk with Surgery** – Excess body fat can make surgery more challenging for the surgeon, hindering access to internal organs and tissue and, thus, prolonging the procedure, which, in turn, increases the risks of complications associated with anesthesia. For these reasons, elective surgery is sometimes postponed until the overweight dog has lost weight.
- **Decreased Activity** – Have you noticed your dog just isn't as interested in chasing after a ball or interacting with the family? Those extra pounds can slow your dog down, often due to a combination of the conditions just listed. Pet owners whose dogs have lost weight reported noticeable improvements in their dog's energy level and willingness to play.

Losing weight is not easy but, with time and commitment on your part, you can help your dog get back in shape. Even a small amount of weight loss can have a dramatic effect on your dog's health, improving quality of life and reducing the risk of serious health problems.
