

This Common Condition Can Shave 2 1/2 Years Off Your Pet's Life – Yet Many Are Completely Oblivious

Sadly, it affects 52.6% of dogs and 57.6% of cats, and can lead to an array of conditions. It can even make your pet arthritic and unable to get around. There are posh solutions to address the problem, but do you actually need to spend that money to keep your pet healthy?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The majority of U.S. dogs and cats are overweight or obese
- Excess weight shaves years off your pet's lifespan and increases the risk of chronic disease, including heart disease, kidney disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer
- Pet sports clubs have opened around the U.S. to increase exercise and fitness, and promote weight loss, in dogs and cats
- A high-quality raw food diet is an excellent choice for most pets in need of weight loss
- If your cat is only mildly overweight, she can probably safely lose up to a pound a month

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The majority of U.S. dogs (52.6%) are overweight or obese,¹ and now doggy sports clubs are popping up around the nation hoping to help solve this dangerous (and lucrative) problem.

If you have an overweight or obese cat (like 57.6% of U.S. kitties are),² she's not excluded. There are even weight-loss centers for cats. How do they work? Each pet "sports club" is unique. One in Virginia charges \$50 a month and boasts of a 6,000-square-foot facility where your dog can run and romp to burn calories.³

At another center in New Jersey, your dog or cat can partake in an indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, low-calorie meals, salon treatments, and even "doga" (that's yoga for dogs).

Is a sports club the answer to your pet's weight problem? If you find it difficult to give your pet the daily exercise and stimulation he requires, then providing an opportunity for him to run and play certainly could help. This may also be an option during the winter, when many dogs (and people) won't last long in the cold.

Also, if your dog is already obese and in need of serious weight loss, joining a pet sports club might help him to lose weight faster than he would otherwise, another potential benefit.

That being said ... does your pet need a fancy sports club or weight-loss center to stay lean and fit? In the majority of cases, absolutely not. What he needs is the appropriate amount of high-quality species-appropriate food, limited healthy treats, regular exercise, and play — all things you can probably provide right at home.

Pet Obesity — What Are the Risks?

If your pet is a healthy weight and in good physical shape, you'll be able to feel his ribs (but not see them), see your pet's waistline when you look down at him, and notice a tuck in the abdomen when he's viewed from the side. Many pet owners think their pet's weight is fine when, in fact, it's not.

One survey conducted by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) found that nearly 46% of dog owners and more than 45% of cat owners believed their overweight or obese pet was a normal weight.⁴

While you might feel you're showing your pet love by feeding him extra food and treats, being overweight or obese can shave up to 2.5 years off your pet's life.⁵ It also puts him at an increased risk of obesity-related diseases, primarily:⁶

- Osteoarthritis
- Insulin resistance
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart and respiratory disease
- Cranial cruciate ligament injury
- Kidney disease
- Many forms of cancer

In extreme cases, you could even be charged with animal cruelty or neglect if you willingly let your pet become morbidly obese. Sadly, pet insurance claims for obesity-related diseases are on the rise, mirroring the rising rates of obesity.

Claims for arthritic pets rose nearly 350% from 2011 to 2012,⁷ and this combination of arthritis and obesity (which puts more strain on joints) can leave your pet unable to get around. Pets may end up being euthanized for this reason, when maintaining a healthy weight could have prevented or reversed the problem.

Risk Factors for Pet Obesity

As rates of pet obesity and overweight have grown, so too have weight problems in people. This may be one factor to watch out for, as research shows overweight dogs are more likely to have overweight owners. There are many other risk factors as well, including:

- **Breed** — Certain breeds of dogs are more apt to be overweight than others, including Cocker Spaniels, Dachshunds, Dalmatians, Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, Rottweilers, Shetland Sheepdogs, and mixed breeds.

- **Gender and neutering** — Male cats are genetically predisposed to become heavy, and the risk increases if your male kitty is neutered.
- **Age** — The risk of overweight increases as your dog or cat gets up in years.
- **Activity level** — Lack of sufficient exercise increases the risk of obesity in your pet.
- **Diet and feeding habits** — Pet food high in carbohydrates and unhealthy fats is the biggest cause of obesity in both dogs and cats. Too many treats is also a problem, as is an “all-day-buffet” feeding schedule in which your pet’s bowl is kept constantly full.

3 Ways to Help Your Pet Lose Weight

If your pet is overweight, there’s a very good chance you’re either feeding the wrong food or too much food — or both. Combine that with insufficient exercise and your pet will soon be far from lean. You should not attempt to put your pet on an extreme diet or withhold food (except if you’ve been feeding “buffet style”). Instead, use the following approach to help your pet slim down gradually (and safely):

- **Feed a balanced, species-appropriate diet to your pet** — Regardless of his weight, your pet needs the right nutrition for her species, which means food that is high in animal protein and moisture, with low or no grain content. Please be aware that many low-calorie or “diet” pet foods are filled with grains that may add to your pet’s weight problem. A high-quality raw food diet is an excellent choice for most pets in need of weight loss.
- **Practice portion control** — Usually a morning and evening meal, carefully measured. A high-protein, low-carb diet with the right amount of calories for weight loss, controlled through the portions you feed, is what will take the weight off your dog or cat. And don't forget to factor in any calories from treats.
- **Regularly exercise your pet** — An overweight body gets back in shape by eating the right foods and expending energy. Daily exercise, including at least 20 minutes of consistent aerobic activity, will help your pet burn fat and increase muscle tone. If you’re unable to provide your pet with this level of exercise (and some pets may need even more), you might consider joining a pet sports club or at least a doggy daycare that gets your pet moving. Another option is to hire a dog walker (or even a cat walker).

One important note for cat owners: it’s very important that your cat lose weight slowly (generally no more than one-half pound per month). This is because overweight kitties are prone to hepatic lipidosis or fatty liver disease. As your cat’s body senses weight being lost, it will begin to mobilize accumulated stores of fat. If weight loss occurs too quickly, the rush of fats being mobilized can overwhelm the liver and shut it down.

Very overweight kitties are more prone to this life-threatening condition because their percentage of body fat is so high. If your cat is only mildly overweight, she can probably safely lose up to a pound a month. You should work with your pet healthcare practitioner to determine a safe and healthy amount of weight loss for your cat (or dog) and the rate at which that weight loss should occur.

Some kitties should lose weight even slower due to existing medical issues like diabetes and other chronic conditions. You can find more details on how to help your overweight cat lose weight in the video below ... and, not to be left out, a video to help your dog lose weight below that.

Sources and References

^{1,2,4,5,6} [Association for Pet Obesity Prevention, Obesity Facts & Risks \(Archived\)](#).

³ [Today September 12, 2014](#).

⁷ [Public Health Nutr. 2010 Jan;13\(1\):102-6](#)
