

Avoid Tragedy – Check Your Pet for This Underlying Condition

It's a common problem, and a frequently ignored one. It's almost as if ignorance is bliss, optimism bias. Except it's really not — because it's linked to deadly inflammation, especially when combined with these other two tell-tale triggers.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Obesity is still on the rise in U.S. pets, as are obesity-related diseases
- Many pet parents don't understand the connection between excess weight and debilitating conditions such as arthritis, liver and kidney disease, urinary tract disorders and more
- Inflammation is the precursor of disease, and excess weight triggers massive amounts of inflammation in your dog's body
- Processed pet food is a root cause of obesity; the best food to offer your dog is a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet consisting of fresh, whole foods
- Portion control, adequate exercise and for some dogs, time-restricted feeding are also necessary to maintain a healthy weight

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Sadly, Nationwide reported an increase in obesity-related insurance claims for dogs and cats in 2016. The pet health insurer received over 1 million claims totaling more than \$60 million, which amounts to a 23% increase over three years.¹ The top 10 obesity-related conditions in dogs during 2016 were:

1. Osteoarthritis
2. Cystitis/urinary tract disease
3. Hypothyroidism
4. Hepatitis/Hepatopathy
5. Cruciate ligament injuries
6. Diabetes
7. Intervertebral disc disease
8. Chronic renal disease
9. Congestive heart failure
10. Lipomas

It's important to understand that if your dog has one or more of these conditions and is also overweight or obese, there is very likely a connection between his weight and his suffering. The exception would be if he acquired the disease(s) before he became overweight.

There's a tendency among guardians of obese pets to view disease in their dogs as unrelated to their weight.

Couple that with too many veterinarians who are very hesitant to bring up obesity as a risk factor for disease, and you have a recipe for the disaster we're now seeing — an epidemic of overweight, sick and debilitated animal companions.

Every Ounce of Excess Weight Is Triggering Deadly Inflammation in Your Dog's Body

According to Dr. Ernie Ward, a veterinarian and founder of the **Association for Pet Obesity Prevention** (APOP), over the last 20 years, the general perception of obesity has evolved from "fat is funny" to "fat is deadly" to "fat is boring."²

People are ignoring warnings about obesity even though they know being overweight is unhealthy for both humans and pets.

Ward says people are practicing "optimism bias" in choosing to believe that the debilitating, life-shortening effects of obesity won't happen to them or their beloved animals. It's a way of coping, but it's also a way of avoiding making crucial lifestyle changes.

That's why Ward now discusses heavy pets not in terms of their weight, but rather the deadly inflammation the extra weight triggers. Excess fat causes what Ward calls an "adipokine storm" inside your dog's or cat's body:

"Adipokines are signal proteins produced by fat tissue," Ward explains. "Leptin, adiponectin and interleukin-6 (IL-6) are examples. We know adipokines cause or contribute to hundreds of harmful inflammatory processes throughout the body.

*Think of every fat cell as a little factory pumping out hundreds of potentially toxic compounds. Multiply that by millions or billions in an obese pet. The real danger of excess fat isn't the fat; it's the inflammation the fat causes."*³

Ward firmly believes inflammation is the biggest threat pets face today. Scientific evidence of the damage excessive inflammation causes to the body continues to mount.

Toxic fat combined with a toxic environment (lawn chemicals, PBDEs, vaccines and flea and tick pesticides, to name just a few) plus malnutrition, courtesy of the processed pet food industry, is a 100% guarantee your pet will suffer from at least one degenerative condition in his or her lifetime.

In addition to the conditions listed above, another disease associated with inflammation is cancer. The cancer rate in today's dogs is a staggering 1 in 2.

Processed Pet Food Is a Root Cause of Pet Obesity

Most holistic veterinarians, believe **processed pet food** is by far the biggest contributor to the pet obesity epidemic. Most commercially available pet diets aren't biologically appropriate for dogs, and are loaded with exactly the types of ingredients that promote weight gain and inflammation in the body.

It's also true that today's dogs are overfed and under-exercised, however, the first thing to scrutinize with any overweight dog is the type of food she's eating.

Look for things like the omega-6 to omega-3 ratio in an animal's diet. Food high in omega-6 essential fatty acids and low in omega-3s (which is the case with most processed pet diets) is associated with inflammatory conditions.

Commercial pet food is also typically high in pro-inflammatory carbohydrates, including processed, high glycemic grains and starchy vegetables like potatoes or lectin-loaded legumes.

If a dog is fed any dry pet food it's a red flag, because all dry pet food contains some form of starch — kibble cannot be produced without it.

Feed Your Dog Like This

Whether your dog is overweight or a perfect weight, the best food you can offer him is a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet consisting of fresh, whole foods, preferably raw, organic and non-GMO. It includes:

- High-quality protein, including muscle meat, organs and bone (protein should make up 75% of a healthy dog's diet)
- Low to moderate levels of animal fat (depending on your pet's activity level)
- High levels of EPA and DHA (omega-3 essential fatty acids)
- A few fresh cut vegetables and a bit of fruit, pureed
- A whole food vitamin/mineral supplement that meets the additional E, zinc, iron, copper, manganese and vitamin D deficiencies often found in homemade diets OR enough of these hard-to-source foods in whole food forms, daily
- Beneficial additions such as probiotics, digestive enzymes and super green foods
- High moisture content
- No grains or starches

You also need to practice portion control religiously, which for most dog parents means feeding a carefully measured morning and evening meal. And don't forget to factor in any calories from healthy treats. Daily exercise, including at least 20 minutes of consistent aerobic activity, will help your dog burn fat, increase muscle tone and maintain the integrity of his musculoskeletal system.

Throw Your Dog a Metabolic Curve Ball

Occasionally, a dog may have difficulty losing weight even when she's being fed the right food in the right portions and is getting plenty of exercise. If this is the case with your dog, you might want to consider throwing her a "metabolic curve ball" by changing the timing of her meals.

Dogs are biologically programmed for regular periods of fasting. In the wild, they catch and eat prey animals and then go for extended periods without food. From a metabolic standpoint, feeding your pet more often than she needs may lead to weight gain. In addition, it may also have a negative influence on her immune system in ways we're only beginning to understand.

A technique called time-restricted feeding (TRF) is one such option that's proven effective for many animals. For dogs, this means allowing the gastrointestinal tract to rest in between meals for 16 to 24 hours (feeding one large meal a day, or two smaller meals six to eight hours apart), which mimics their eating behavior in the wild.

What we're learning is that changing not only what we feed dogs but how and when we feed dogs can substantially alter their immuno-metabolic health.⁴

Sources and References

¹ [dvm360, January 31, 2017 \(Archived\)](#).
^{2, 3} [dvm360, August 18, 2015 \(Archived\)](#).
⁴ [Science. 12 Mar 1982:Vol. 215, Issue 4538, pp 1415-1418 \(Archived\)](#).
