

About Obesity in Dogs

Canine obesity is a growing problem

In the US, it is estimated that about 17 million dogs are overweight or obese. Veterinarians say that almost half of the dogs they treat are too heavy.

Causes of obesity

There are 2 main causes of obesity in dogs: too much food and too little exercise. Other factors can also play a role. Some breeds of dogs, such as Labrador retrievers, beagles, and cocker spaniels, are more likely to gain weight. The same is true of neutered dogs, middle-aged dogs, and female dogs.

Overweight versus obese

A dog is considered overweight if it is 5% to 19% above its ideal weight. An obese dog is 20% or more above its ideal weight.

For example, if your dog's ideal weight is 50 pounds, a weight gain of 10 pounds would be a 20% gain—that would make your dog obese. Ask your veterinarian to tell you what a healthy weight is for your dog.

Do extra pounds matter?

Yes, they do. An extra 7 pounds in a dog that normally weighs 35 pounds is a very big deal. It's similar to an extra 30 pounds on a person who should weigh 150 pounds.

An obese dog may not always be a happy dog

Dogs are not so different from people. When they are too heavy, they might not feel as good. They may find it more difficult to stand up, greet you at the door, or run and play.

That's why helping your dog lose weight is so important. It can help your dog play a more active part in your life.

Health Risks of Obesity

Excess weight is a serious health problem for dogs. In the US, about 4 in 10 dogs are too heavy. If your dog is carrying extra pounds, it can

- Increase the risk of arthritis, heart disease, and more
- Make your dog uncomfortable
- Make it hard for your dog to run, play, or be active
- Limit the way your dog interacts with you and other family members

Other effects of excess weight

Some effects of excess weight are less obvious. For instance, a dog that weighs too much often has trouble breathing in warm weather. It may also have a hard time controlling its body temperature.

If an obese dog needs surgery, the extra fat can make it harder for the surgeon to operate. Since fat absorbs the drug that puts the dog "under," it sometimes takes longer for an obese dog to recover after anesthesia.

Excess weight affects a dog's life in many ways— none of them good.