



# Navarro Small Animal Clinic

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## Obesity in Pets

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Obesity is an extremely important health concern in our pets. It is associated with joint problems, diabetes mellitus, respiratory problems, liver issues, and decreased life span. Our pets rely completely on us to feed and exercise them therefore it is our responsibility to monitor and help our pets maintain a healthy weight.

Some common problems we find when consulting with pet owners are the fact that they free feed their pets. This allows their pet to munch on food all day long, whether they are hungry or simply bored. When pet food is formulated commercially the exact amount of protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals are calculated and adjusted for your pet's weight. This means that your pet could be getting enough food for two or every three animals your pet's size. Pet food has packaging guidelines that can help you keep your pet at a healthy weight. This is a great starting point to make sure you are feeding your animal the proper amount of food each day. This is simply a starting point and may need to be adjusted with the consultation of your veterinarian.

Some pets are genetically predisposed to becoming obese. These breeds include Golden Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels, Dachshunds, Shetland Sheepdogs, Boxers, Cairn Terriers, Basset Hounds, and Labrador Retrievers. If you own one of these breeds it is crucial that you monitor and control food intake and provide plenty of daily exercise.

Table scraps are another huge cause of obesity in our pets. If your pet is being fed the proper amount of kibble then no additional food or table scraps should be needed to supplement their diet. For a twenty pound dog, eating one hot dog is the same as a person consuming three entire hamburgers. For a ten pound cat, eating one ounce of cheddar cheese is the same as a person eating three and half hamburgers.

Treats can also be a culprit for obesity. Some treats are very high in calories so feeding a few can lead to another meal's worth of calories and/or fat. If you do not want to give up treats consider something low in calories like green beans or low fat treats.

A slow metabolism can cause a pet to not burn calories efficiently. This may be caused by hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease. Testing for these issues can be helpful in resolving your pet's obesity problem.

The first step to weight loss is cutting back on food and increasing exercise. You will want to feed meals instead of doing free choice feeding. If your dog weighs twenty pounds and its ideal weight should be more like fifteen then you should start feeding your dog accordingly. This means only giving what the dog food recommends for a fifteen pound dog. You will also want to purchase low fat treats or give healthy treats such as green beans. Regularly weigh your dog so that you can see progress during the weight loss process. To increase your pet's activity level, consider getting interactive toys for your pet.