



FAT CATS NEED RESCUING



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Humans aren't the only Americans affected by our obesity epidemic. Our pets' waistlines are bulging, too. Nearly half our nation's dogs and cats are overweight or obese, according to a study by the American Journal of Veterinary Research.

Research shows Americans spent millions of dollars last year in obesity-related veterinary costs.

"Obesity is, by far, the most common health issue we see as family veterinarians," says Debra Draper, medical director of Cypress Creek Animal Hospital in Lutz. "Ironically, the serious and costly diseases associated with being overweight are also the most preventable.

"Some pet parents might not see a problem with their pet's extra pound or two," she says. "But in a down economy like this one, pet owners will likely take issue with paying higher veterinary bills, and that's what having an overweight pet often leads to."

A few extra pounds on a dog or cat can be comparable to a person carrying around an extra 30 to 50. When a pet is overweight, its whole body works harder to support that weight.

From diabetes to arthritis, disc disease, cruciate ligament rupture, hypertension, and even asthma, ailments caused by extra fat are numerous, and the risks for developing these problems is high.

"These conditions can become costly," Draper says. "And some evolve into chronic, incurable conditions."

Veterinary Pet Insurance recently

reported it reimbursed more than \$14 million last year for claims with direct links to pet obesity. Sure enough, some of the most common included diabetes and joint and back issues.

"In this current economy, pet owners are often tempted to switch to cheaper pet food brands in order to cut corners," Draper says. "The problem is, less-expensive diets are often made to taste extra flavorful by adding calories and unhealthy byproducts, which can fatten pets up.

"Making sure a pet eats a quality diet in the proper amounts can literally add years to their life and save pet owners dollars in the long run."

To help your pets stay at a healthy weight and live a longer life, Draper offers these tips:

- **Control portions.** Feed your pets according to their body weight and age. Your vet can help you determine the best amount and type of food your pet should be eating.
- **Go for a walk.** Increase your pet's activity gradually if they aren't accustomed to regular exercise.
- **Make exercise fun.** Cats love hunting, so hiding treats around their environment puts their instinct to work, while giving them a workout.
- **Visit your veterinarian.** Regular visits are the single most effective way to keep a close tab on your pet's health. The earlier you catch a weight-related issue, the less life-threatening and costly it could become.
- **Diet responsibly.** Diet carefully

OBESITY IS A COMMON AND COSTLY ISSUE FOR PETS, BUT IT'S OFTEN EASY TO PREVENT.

WEIGHTY FACTS

- Up to 60 percent of American adults are overweight or obese.
- About 7.2 million U.S. dogs are estimated to be obese and 26 million overweight; 15.7 million cats are estimated to be obese and 35 million are overweight.
- Smaller pets can tip the scales with only two to three pounds of extra weight.
- 52 percent of dogs and 55 percent of cats older than 7 were found to be overweight or obese.

Sources: Journal of the American Medical Association, Journal of Nutrition

with guidance from your vet. Losing too much weight too quickly can be dangerous to your pets, especially your cat.

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