

I was told my dog needs to lose weight. I cut back on his food, but he hasn't lost any weight. What else can I do?

Obesity is a serious but all too common problem for many dogs. Extra pounds not only make it harder to keep up with physical activity, but predispose a dog to heart disease, diabetes, orthopedic problems and even a shorter life span. So if you want to keep your pooch around for as long as possible, feeding a high quality diet to maintain an ideal body weight is a great place to start.

What is your dog's ideal body weight? You should be able to feel your dog's ribs easily. Your dog should also have a waistline when viewed from the top or the side. His body should gradually narrow between the end of the rib cage and the hip bones.

Do you actually measure your dog's food? Don't just scoop out the kibble, you need to provide an accurately measured portion of food two meals per day. Your veterinarian should be able to help you calculate how many calories and how much food your dog should eat per day. If your dog is overweight on a calculated diet and you try to reduce the amount you feed, he may complain. There are a few tricks to help him feel full. Switching to a low calorie (light) version of his food will have more fiber, allowing your dog to consume fewer calories in the same amount of kibble. Or you can add the fiber in the form of green beans or canned pumpkin. Both of these foods will help your dog feel full without adding too many calories. If your dog has any allergies or other health conditions, please discuss these diet changes with your veterinarian before you begin.

Exercise can also help your dog lose weight. Talk to your veterinarian about your dog's current fitness level and get suggestions for starting an appropriate exercise program. Letting your dog play in the yard is rarely sufficient to maintain fitness, let alone lose weight. A walking or running program may be needed.

So what if you've been diligent about calories and exercise and your pup still hasn't lost any weight? Then it's time to look for other factors. Is he getting extra treats or table food? Remember they have calories too! Another potential problem is hypothyroidism, a condition where the dog does not make enough thyroid hormone. This results in a slower metabolism and increased chance to gain weight. A blood test can diagnose this disease, and treatment is fairly easy.

Hopefully this gives you some suggestions to get your dog's weight off. Weight him monthly at home if he's a small dog or at your veterinarian's office if he's larger. Celebrate any success and ask for help if needed. Your pooch will thank you!

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