Welcome to The Coloradoan Ft. Collins, CO.

Customer Service: Subscribe Now | Place an Ad | Contact Us | Make us your Homepage

coloradoan.com Weather Calendar Jobs Cars Homes Apartments Shopping Classifieds Dating

coloradoan.com Bringing Fort Collins Home

Search Northern Colorado: All Go

Saturday, January 5, 2008

ADVERTISEMENT

- Home
- News
- Local News
- Archives
- News Tips
- Sports
- Prep Sports
- CSU Zone
- Obituaries
- Nation / World
- Celebrations
- Opinion
- Business
- Lifestyles
- Outdoors
- Blogs
- Photo Galleries
- Discussion Forums
- Columnists
- Special Reports
- Ski and Snow Report
- Travel
- Technology
- Weather
- RSS Feeds
- Entertainment
- NoCoMoms.com
- Loveland Connection
- Windsor Beacon
- NoCoDataMine
- Communities
- Directories
- Health
- Printing Press
- Advertising
- Customer Service

Email Newsletter

ADVERTISEMENT

Fat cat, hoggie doggie

Porky pets need weight management from humans

BY LINDA LOMBARDI
For The Associated Press

Wild animals don't have to make a New Year's resolution to go on a diet.

"We used to laugh when I was in vet school and say, there aren't any fat wolves," says Denver veterinarian Kevin Fitzgerald, of Animal Planet's "Emergency Vets" and "E-Vet Interns."

ADVERTISEMENT

Unfortunately for those of us living more domesticated lives - no matter the species - weight is no laughing matter. As more Americans struggle with obesity, there's an unsurprising result for the pets sitting on the couch with us. About a third of American pets are overweight, according to some studies.

"Sadly, our companion animals reflect our lifestyle. If you're sedentary, there's a pretty good chance your dog is sedentary, too," Fitzgerald says.

Carrying too much weight affects the health of nearly every system of the body - joints, heart, respiratory system, even skin - as well your pet's lifespan. But the good news is that, unlike many other health issues, this is one where you can make a real difference.

For pets, just like for people, the solution is simple, if not always easy: burn more, eat less. Fortunately, your dog

Zoom Photo

David Zalubowski/The Associated Press

Barbara Buckley holds up Emma, her 13-year-old cat. Emma weighs in at 20 pounds, while her brother, Tom, registers 18 pounds on the scales.

What you should know about pet obesity

Dog obesity can have serious health effects:

> Joints and bones: "Extra weight aggravates the joints," says Denver veterinarian Kevin Fitzgerald, of Animal Planet's "Emergency Vets" and "E-Vet Interns." "Things like underlying hip dysplasia - if you keep lean, you're not going to add to it. Dogs that are overweight have a much higher incidence of problems with the knees." And in animals that

ADVERTISEMENT

or cat can't work the can opener, or get into the fridge for a midnight snack. You're in control.

It's important to have the whole family on board, which isn't always easy, as Lynnette Morrison of Denver knows. When Morrison takes her Tibetan terrier, Nikki, to be weighed, "Dr Fitzgerald says, 'You tell Pops to lay off the human food.'"

It sounds simple. But her husband Doug is home all day with Nikki. "He adores this dog," Morrison says. And like many of us, the way he shows his love is through sharing his food.

Morrison understands why it's hard to say no to Nikki. "She's the cutest darn thing," she says. But she adds, "I want to keep her around. It all has to come down to eating habits."

Fitzgerald says the first step is a basic one: measure your pet's food. He advises pet owners to use a measuring cup when doling out food, unlike some of his clients. "They'll say "Oh, I'm doing a cup" - and it's not a cup, it's a coffee can!"

Fitzgerald emphasizes that this goes for cats too. "Feeding free-choice for cats is a big problem. Put the food down for 30 minutes twice a day and pick it up."

You don't have to totally eliminate treats - just include them in the day's measure of food. "There are tricks," Fitzgerald says. "Break the biscuit into thirds." After all, what dog wouldn't rather think he was getting three cookies instead of one?

Your vet can help you decide the correct amount to feed, and may be able to recommend a reduced-calorie food. And it's important to consult with your vet about cats, who are subject to potentially fatal fatty liver syndrome if they lose weight too fast.

Barbara Buckley knows how extra weight can sneak up in your pets. She got her cats Tom and Emma as abandoned kittens. "They were skin and bones," she said. So when they were about 8 years old, she was surprised when she had Emma weighed at Fitzgerald's clinic, and thought, as she put it, "She's a porker!"

Tom and Emma used to go to work with Buckley. When they started staying home, they were much less active, and of course, age slows down metabolism. So the problem had crept up gradually.

Fitzgerald agrees that, while diet is primary, inactivity is part of the problem for our indoor pets. "A lot of cats are apartment dwellers - they don't get any exercise. We've taken a hunter, stalker species and made them couch potatoes."

already have a tendency toward bad backs, including specific breeds like the dachshund, "you don't want to put extra weight on those discs that are bad to begin with."

> Heart and respiratory system: "We have a lot of respiratory problems in overweight animals. Things like collapsing trachea and asthma are tremendously aggravated by being overweight," Fitzgerald says. And the relationship between extra weight and heart disease is well established in both humans and animals. "The more weight you carry, the harder it is for your heart."

> Diabetes: As in humans, being overweight carries the risk of diabetes. "Your pancreas is set to an optimal body weight. If you body mass is more than it should be, your pancreas is overworked, stops producing insulin, and bang, you've got diabetes," Fitzgerald says.

> Cancer: Extra weight can increase cancer risk, and the effects are long-term. "Dogs that are obese at 1 year of age have a higher incident of mammary cancer as 10 year olds," Fitzgerald says. And diets high in fat and sugar make your pets more prone to intestinal cancer and cancer of the colon.

> Lifespan: If you keep your pets at a healthy weight, you're likely to have them with you longer. "Some studies with beagles have shown that optimal weight beagles live one to two years longer than dogs that are 20-30 percent overweight," Fitzgerald says.

Is your pet overweight? How to judge at home

If you're concerned about a pet's weight, try this home exam:

"The first thing we do is we put our hand on the rib cage. If you can feel the ribs and not see them, then the dog is in ideal condition," says Denver veterinarian Kevin Fitzgerald, of Animal Planet's "Emergency Vets" and "E-Vet Interns."

Then look down from above.

"Is there a waist behind the rib cage? Or is he a round fellow?"

You should see a waist from the side, also. This goes for cats, too.

Playing with your pets more will help burn more calories, but don't suddenly start taking your dog on marathons, since extra weight and its associated health problems can affect the ability to exercise. "Talk to your vet about your dogs' overall condition and how much is realistic," he says.

And remember that you're in it for the long haul - you won't see results overnight. "I see that the people are psyched - for two months they do a great job, and six months later they're back to the same weight."

It's a long-term commitment. But you owe it to your pets, because it's all up to you.

"They're not deciding that they get ice cream every night," Fitzgerald says. "They're not deciding one for me, one for you as we sit in front of the TV. We have a tremendous responsibility."

"When we look from the side, are there visible rolls hanging? You see that in cats a lot."

Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:
- Life
- Holidays
- New Year's Day/Eve

Powered by topix.net

STORYCHAT Post a Comment

This article does not have any comments associated with it

Originally published January 3, 2008

Print this article **E-mail this to a friend**

Subscribe Now

Contact Us | Subscribe | Place an ad
Copyright ©2008 The Fort Collins Coloradoan.
All rights reserved.
Users of this site agree to the
Terms of Service and Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights
(Terms updated March 2007)

Our Video Partner 9NEWS.com