

Killer Calories are Catastrophic for Our Pets!

We all want our pets to live forever. Although that is not possible, we can prolong their time with us through common sense and preventative medicine. Nutrition is one area where research has shown you can make a huge difference in your own life and that of your pet. These days it is no longer considered cute or jolly to see an overweight dog or fat cat, because what you actually are seeing is a pet owner who is literally killing his furry friend with kindness. Pets don't count calories and will keep eating as long as we keep feeding them. Dogs will keep wagging their tails, and cats will come running for treats because they see how we laugh and react to them, but in reality, we are slowly taking a toll on their good health.

Pets are much smaller than we are- a large dog is less than half the size of a grown man, and a small dog is only a fraction of our size. Consequently, it is easy to overdo the calories. In veterinary school, I was taught that one large dog biscuit has more than 450 calories, which is about the same as a large can of dog food. When put into perspective with the pet's size, that large dog biscuit is the equivalent of a person eating two Big Macs! Even small biscuits are loaded with calories; for a dog, the caloric content is much the same that we would ingest if you or I each ate two Snickers candy bars!

When animals are fed normal pet food and multiple treats, as well as "people food" and table scraps, it isn't long before they are overweight and eventually downright obese. This affects their heart and lungs, the joints of their legs and all their internal organs. It not only takes years off their life, but causes them pain and suffering, as well. The best way to control weight is to manage calories taken in and to burn off excess calories with exercise. Fortunately, obesity can be prevented predominately by

dietary means. Controlling the amount of calories consumed can prevent and reverse obesity. This is not to say that you should not exercise your pets, but there are times that it just isn't possible. Even then, you can make a difference in your pet's quality of life with calorie control. All it takes is the commitment of the pet owner and a proper diet. Talk to your veterinarian, who can recommend a good diet that will prevent a healthy pet from gaining too much weight or a chubby pet lose those harmful, excess pounds.

I do recommend that pet owners try to cut down on treats. My pets love their treats, no matter how big or small they are, so I make a point to break a treat into three or four pieces that I give out one at a time. That cuts out a lot of calories! A good rule to remember is to not give your pet any treat bigger than the fingernail on your pinky finger. Avoiding table scraps that can have a lot of fat or carbohydrate and sugar calories in them also is wise. Once again, if you put into perspective based on your pet's size, even the amount of carbs and calories in a few pieces of carrot can add up in a hurry.

Exercise is important as well, and sometimes the best treat of all is to take your dog out for a walk and to play fetch or Frisbee. Sitting down and playing on the floor with your cat is not only healthy, but gives you an opportunity to bond with your pet. Younger dogs may want to run along you as you jog, and that is great, as long as you are aware of the temperature to avoid overheating and the road surface to prevent injury to their foot pads. When it comes to healthy lifestyles and diet choices, there is not much difference between humans and our animals. Keep in mind, however, that pets are totally dependent on us to make those choices for them. The more aware you are of your pets' weight and overall health, the longer they will live and provide you with love and companionship.