

Keeping your pet in shape

We are all too aware of the epidemic of obesity facing humans in developed countries, but what about our pets?











With obesity becoming increasingly common, it is a good idea to look objectively at your pets and see if they are overweight or not. Run your hands over their chest – you should be able to easily feel (but not see) their ribs without pressing too hard. They should also have a “waist”, when viewed from both above and the side. By contrast, if you can pinch an inch or more, and if your pet’s stomach sags down and bulges out, then a diet may be in order.

The big issue is that carrying extra weight can lead to a range of health risks including:-

Arthritis: if joints are under constant strain from extra weight, they are more likely to become arthritic and painful. **Diabetes:** for cats, being obese is a huge risk factor for them developing diabetes. **Heart disease:** excess body fat puts the heart under increased strain and can hasten the onset of heart failure, especially in ‘at risk’ breeds.

How can you ensure your pet stays at the right weight? The most important thing is to ensure their diet is one suitable for them and their lifestyle. Neutered pets tend to have a slower metabolism and so can be more prone to weight gain and there are now several foods on the market that are formulated specifically for them. Some breeds are more vulnerable to being overweight, Labradors for example, and both breed and ‘type’ tailored diets are available. Indoor cats will be much more sedentary than outdoor ones and diets exist that take this into account. Also, don’t forget to limit the amount of treats they have!

So - how can you help a pet lose weight? Firstly, there are many different ‘light’ diets on the market which will keep your pets just as full but lower their calorie intake. Secondly, all pets need regular exercise – and increased walks, more frequent play, or increased access to outdoors are all part of the answer. Additionally make them work for their dinner using puzzle toys and at the same time keep them entertained for hours. The good news is that as your pet loses weight, the benefits of increased healthiness and vitality are usually seen quite quickly. So, if you think your pet has been piling on the pounds please get in touch – we are here to help!

BODY 1 SCORE	BODY 2 SCORE	BODY 3 SCORE	BODY 4 SCORE	BODY 5 SCORE
VERY THIN < 5% body fat Ribs – Easily felt with no fat cover Tail Base – Bones are raised, no fat cover Side View – Severe abdominal tuck Overhead View – Accentuated hourglass shape 20% below ideal body weight	UNDERWEIGHT 5-15% body fat Ribs – Easily felt with little fat cover Tail Base – Bones are raised with slight fat cover Side View – Abdominal tuck Overhead View – Marked hourglass shape 10% below ideal body weight	IDEAL BODY WEIGHT 16-25% body fat Ribs – Easily felt with slight fat cover Tail Base – Some contour with slight fat cover Side View – Abdominal tuck Overhead View – Well-proportioned waist Ideal body weight	OVERWEIGHT 26-35% body fat Ribs – Difficult to feel under moderate fat cover Tail Base – Some thickening, bones palpable under moderate fat cover Side View – No abdominal tuck Overhead View – Back is slightly broadened at waist 10% above ideal body weight	OBESE > 35% body fat Ribs – Difficult to feel under thick fat cover Tail Base – Thickened and difficult to feel under thick fat cover Side View – No waist, fat hangs from abdomen Overhead View – Back is markedly broadened. 20% above ideal body weight
				
				
Consult your veterinarian!	Consult your veterinarian to see if you are underfeeding your dog.	Great job! Keep doing what you are doing.	Consult your veterinarian about the right nutrition for your dog and about ways to increase activity.	Extra weight can cause serious health problems for your dog. Consult your veterinarian about the right nutrition for your dog.





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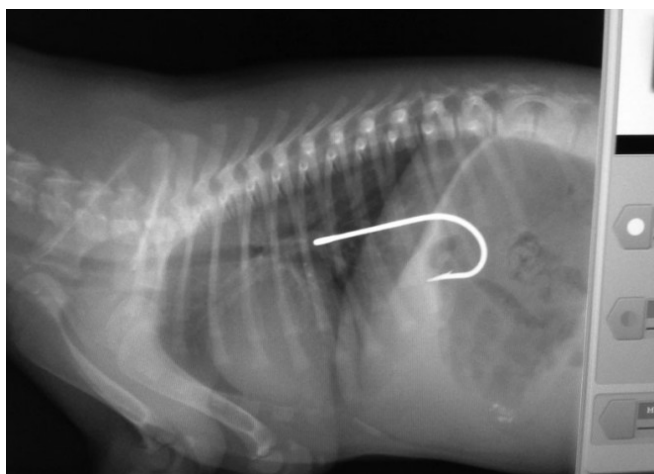
Some pets will eat anything!

Staying on the subject of things that pets like to eat, some pets unfortunately love snacking on a wide variety of everyday items that end up stuck in their stomach or small intestines.

Cats, and particularly kittens, are very keen on swallowing tinsel at Christmas, wool and other stringy objects (often with needles attached as well!). These almost invariably get stuck in their small intestines and require surgery to remove them.

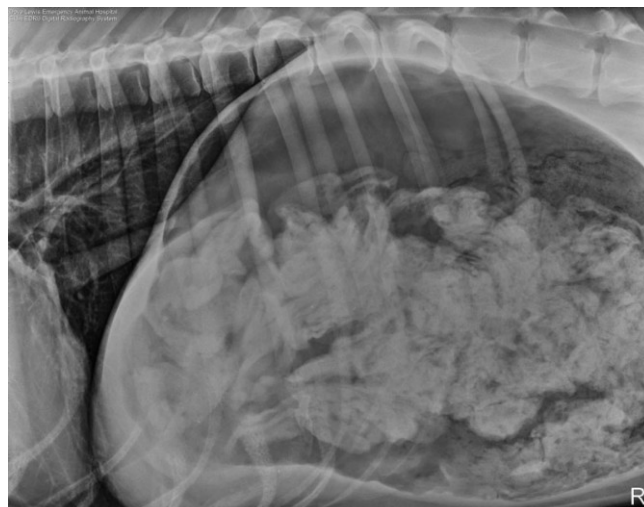
Dogs seem to delight in eating socks, children's toys - the list is huge! Unfortunately many of these objects, once swallowed, will require surgery to remove them.

So – as well as trying to ensure your pets don't eat these objects, we strongly recommend **pet insurance** to cover you against these unexpected eventualities!



A 7.5-week-old puppy went with his owners on a fishing trip. Apparently, the chicken liver bait was enough to entice the pup to try it out. Unfortunately, he swallowed the hook as well.

The pup was taken to the vet, where they performed a gastrotomy. The hook had perforated the stomach, but thanks to timely surgery and antibiotics, he made a full recovery.



Next time you are doing laundry and can't find that missing sock, you might want to check your dog's stomach.

A 3-year-old Great Dane was taken to the vet after he started vomiting. X-rays showed a large amount of foreign material in the dog's stomach.

After exploratory surgery, the family was shocked to find out their dog had eaten 43.5 socks! You read that right, 43.5 socks. Fortunately, the dog was fine.





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Caring for your older cat

In their twilight years our cats can suffer from a range of conditions, but they are also experts at hiding the signs of illness! So, looking out for subtle changes in their behaviour can really make a difference. Here are some tips:

Sore joints: Recent studies have shown that approximately 80% of cats over the age of twelve have arthritis. However, it can be difficult to identify because they simply rest more, and because they are naturally athletic animals, they will often still jump, climb and play, but not as much as they used to. Ask us to check their joints next time you are paying us a visit, and if we are concerned, a trial of pain relief medication often lets us know if they are sore or not. Make a stiff, elderly cat's life easier by placing steps up to their favourite places, putting food bowls close to where they rest, using low sided litter trays and giving them deep, soft beds in warm, cosy places.



Weight loss: Senior cats can lose weight due to many different conditions, but often it is such a gradual process we don't notice. It's a good idea to get into the habit of weighing your pensionable pussycat on a regular basis and if you notice a downward trend, bring them in for a check-up.

Drinking more: Kidney Failure and Diabetes are fairly common in older cats and both will cause them to drink more than they should. In fact, cats naturally drink very little, so often a cat who drinks 'well', is actually drinking to excess and should have a check-up.

Eating less: Sore teeth and Kidney Failure are two of the most likely causes of a reduced or changed appetite in a cat. If their mouth is painful they often keep eating, but they may start to prefer wet food or, if watched carefully, not actually chew properly. It can be difficult to fully check their mouths at home, so if you are worried, just bring them down!

Eating more: An over-active thyroid gland (Hyperthyroidism) and Diabetes will both make cats eat more, and while this is often taken as a sign of good health, it can be the opposite, especially if they are losing weight despite their appetite.

So – as you can see there are a lot of signs to keep a watchful eye out for. In addition it's also a good idea to bring older pets in for regular health-checks so that any problems can be picked up as early as possible.





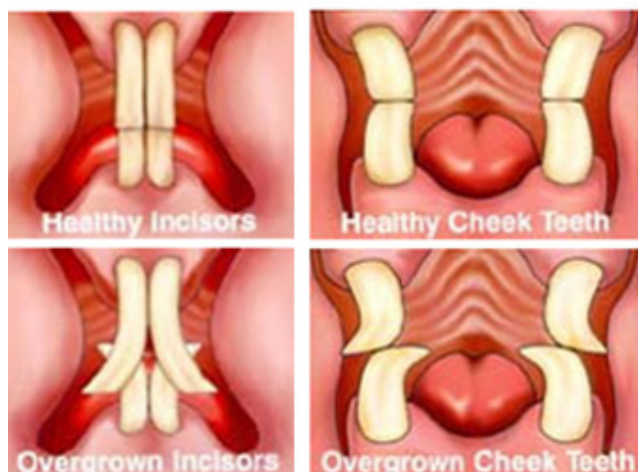
Rabbit teeth - a growing issue!

Did you know that rabbits have unusual teeth in that they are continually growing? In fact their teeth are perfectly adapted to their natural diet of tough abrasive vegetation, which – without continued tooth growth, would soon result in their teeth being totally ground down to nothing!

Thus, to keep our pet bunny's teeth healthy, most of their diet should comprise of good quality hay (which is very abrasive), a small amount of fresh green leafy vegetables, and a small amount of a pelleted rabbit feed. This keeps their teeth at a healthy (short) length plus also getting all the vital nutrition they need.

However it is easy to feed too much hard food (often of the muesli kind), which bunnies often prefer, and so ignore the hay. Insufficient hay means the teeth aren't ground down and so grow too long, developing sharp spikes which tear into the mouth (see photo). Muesli type mixes also encourage selective feeding, leaving vital nutrients uneaten and which can lead to bone weakness. For this reason, it is better to replace the muesli mix component with pelleted food.

The good news is that feeding the correct diet, as outlined above, can go a long way to avoiding most dental problems in rabbits. For more advice, please have a chat to our team who will be very happy to advise you!



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