

Canine Weight Loss & Compliance

Excessive weight is a rising concern for both people and pets. The actual number of overweight and obese dogs has been conservatively estimated at 25% to 30% and more than 60% of adult Americans are overweight or obese. When owners of overweight pets are overweight or obese, a combined weight loss program can lead to greater compliance.

P-PET PROGRAM STUDY³

A study of the P-PET Program (People and Pets Exercise Together) was completed recently at the Wellness Institute at the Northwestern Memorial Hospital. It showed that of 3 groups of overweight participants (dog/owner, dog only, people only), 80% of dogs in combined dog/owner groups completed the study versus 68% of the dog-only group. Dogs were fed a low-fat, nutritionally balanced food (Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine r/d®), an exercise plan was provided, and a regular weigh-in was scheduled. People were provided with a meal plan, diet strategies, and pedometers. Once each dog's ideal weight was reached, it was fed Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine w/d® as a maintenance food.

KEY POINTS

- Obesity is the most common nutritional disorder among people¹ and pets.²
- Obesity is primarily caused by the same factors in people and pets — consumption of too many calories combined with too little physical activity.
- Health risks associated with obesity are similar in people and pets (e.g., heart disease, skeletal problems, breathing problems, diabetes, and arthritis).
- Obesity can significantly reduce the life expectancy of pets and people.

SUCCESSFUL WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAMS

Many factors contribute to a successful weight loss program, the most important being com-

mitment and communication between the client and the health care team. It has been shown recently that linking a pet weight loss program to a weight loss program for the client (see **P-PET Program** sidebar) can be very effective for both (clients can obtain weight loss information for themselves and their pets at www.petfit.com).

A common cause of lack of weight loss in pets is an inaccurate estimate of daily energy requirements (DER) and inappropriate food portions. Formulas need to be tailored to individuals as the obese patient may have a below-average DER. The weight loss food must also provide for nutritional needs that differ from normal. Fiber, protein, and L-carnitine should be increased while fat intake must be reduced. Determining the caloric needs of the pet is the first order of business and can be done by trial-and-error or by formula. However, caloric requirements calculated at the beginning may need adjusting during the weight loss program for best results.

SUCCESSFUL CANINE WEIGHT LOSS CHECKLIST

- Set a weight loss goal based on ideal body weight (BCS score).
- Determine the recommended daily calorie requirement.
- Select the food and determine exact amounts for meals and snacks.
- Feed small meals — not free choice.
- Control food for other pets in the household to prevent double feeding.
- Recommend a specific amount of exercise to preserve lean body mass and increase gradually as weight loss occurs.
- Weight loss should be between 0.5% and 2% of initial body weight per week.
- Adjust calories, food, and exercise as needed.
- Encourage clients to join with their pets in a weight loss program.
- Monitor progress regularly with regular weigh-ins and evaluations to keep owners motivated.

CASE STUDY

WEIGHT LOSS Barney James



Hx

- 6-year-old neutered male mixed breed
- Weighs 65 lb, Body Condition Score (BCS) of 4/5 (overweight)
- Eats brand name commercial grocery store dog food, table scraps, treats, and younger dog's food.

Dx

- Overweight and at risk for disease. Blood and urinalysis tests normal.

Rx

- Feed to reduce weight; begin exercise program

PROBLEM

Uncontrolled eating; steals younger housemate's food

SOLUTION

Please turn the page ...

SOLUTION

Barney was adopted as a middle-aged adult and weighed 50 lb (BCS 3) at that time. Eli, a 10-month-old neutered male mixed terrier, was adopted at the same time. Barney quickly became top dog and happily adapted to his new family. He loved his meals which were now on a regular basis; however, he not only liked his food, he also liked to eat table scraps and Eli's food whenever he got the chance. Both dogs also received treats occasionally. Dr. Williams of the Castle Canine Clinic had followed both dogs since they were adopted and was surprised to note that Barney had gained 11 pounds in the 2 years that he had been with the James family.

Recommendation

Dr. Williams explained to Mrs. James that because of Barney's age, the weight gain put him at risk for several diseases and recommended that a weight loss program be started immediately. Mrs. James was unhappy about the health risks for her beloved pet and agreed it was time to do something about the weight gain. Dr. Williams encouraged Mrs. James to log onto www.petfit.com to get helpful information and tips for weight loss and to find out about the P-PET Program. Dr. Williams phoned the Hill's Veterinary Consultation Service (800-548-VETS), discussed Barney with a Hill's veterinarian, and calculated that Barney should be fed about 800 calories per day to begin losing weight. He also recommended that Eli be fed on a supervised meal-only basis to prevent Barney from eating any leftover food from Eli's dish.

- Barney would be fed his usual volume of food, substituting Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine r/d®, a less calorie dense food specially formulated for weight loss. An additional 4 Hill's® Prescription Diet® Canine treats per day would be within the calorie allotment.

Acceptance

The compliance team took a "before" photo, weighed Barney, and determined his BCS, including them on his chart. Mrs. James agreed to bring Barney back every 2 weeks to measure his progress. She also agreed to start walking with Barney every evening, working up to a goal of walking for 40 minutes at a moderate pace, 4 times a week, as she was anxious to prevent obesity from shortening his life.

Follow-Through

Mrs. James brought Barney in every other week for a weigh-in and someone on the compliance team charted his progress. Weight loss was progressive although there were a few weeks when he did not lose any weight or just stayed the same. Various team members spent time with Mrs. James and Barney, celebrating his successes and encouraging Mrs. James to continue the new exercise plan. Barney's weight loss was an inspiration for Mrs. James to stay on her own weight loss program as well, and she admitted that she felt better, enjoyed her walks with Barney, and was pleased that other members of the family often joined them.

Outcome for Barney

Barney returned to a normal weight of 52 lb and Mrs. James lost a substantial amount of weight herself. There was no question that the new dietary regimen and the new exercise program improved Barney's condition and quality of life — he was acting like a much younger dog and looked forward to their evening walks. Mrs. James promised that she would see to it that both of them would stay well by keeping the weight off and exercising together regularly — especially now that the entire family, including Eli, had become involved in the evening walks, adding quality family time to improved health.



Karyn Gavzer, MBA, CVPM
Practice Management
& Compliance Consultant
Springboro, OH

People love their pets and never intend to overfeed them. The doctor and staff did a great job focusing Mrs. James on the benefits of weight loss for Barney and explaining that exercise and a diet change would be the best prescription to get the weight off. Excellent at-home feeding directions (including tips on how to feed her two dogs separately), regularly scheduled weigh-ins, and charting Barney's progress were especially helpful in keeping Mrs. James motivated. Low calorie canine biscuits were thoughtfully included so that Barney could still be given treats — something most pet owners, if not their dogs, can't do without! Finally, by providing the web resource for the P-PET program, they made it fun for Mrs. James to join Barney in reaching his goal weight.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS DURING WEIGHT LOSS

- Fiber is beneficial for increased satiety without increased caloric intake.
- Protein should be high enough to prevent loss of lean body mass.
- L-carnitine supplementation is beneficial during weight loss to help increase lean body mass and decrease excess body fat.
- Fat levels should be less than 12% to reduce caloric density (34 kcal metabolizable energy/g dry matter).

FORMULA FOR COMPLIANCE SUCCESS*

$$C = R + A + FT$$

C = Compliance standards of quality patient care

R = Recommendation & Reinforcement by health care team

A = Acceptance of protocol by owner

FT = Follow-Through by health care team

*See also, *Compliance in Companion Animal Practices*, © 2003 American Animal Hospital Association (info@aahanet.org), sponsored by an educational grant from Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc.

REFERENCES

1. *Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000.
2. *Small Animal Clinical Nutrition* (4th ed.). Hand MS, et al. Mark Morris Associates, 2000.
3. *The P-PET Study - People and Pets Exercising Together: The Role of Companion Animals as Social Support for Weight Loss and Weight Maintenance*. Kushner RE, Jackson D, Baltes A, et al. North American Association for the Study of Obesity, Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, November 2004.

