

Obesity in Cats: A Growing Concern

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60%

of cats are overweight. According to the Morris Animal Foundation, obesity is a widespread issue among cats.

Preventable & Treatable

While obesity can lead to serious health issues like diabetes, it's preventable and treatable through diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes.

Role of Caregivers

As a cat caregiver, you can manage your cat's weight, increase enrichment activities, and encourage healthy habits to improve their physical and emotional quality of life.

Key Risk Factors for Diabetes in Cats

1 Obesity

- **Increased Risk:** Overweight cats have a significantly higher risk of developing diabetes due to excess fat affecting insulin sensitivity.
- **Impact on Blood Sugar Regulation:** Excess weight interferes with the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, which can lead to diabetes.
- **Vicious Cycle:** Once a cat becomes diabetic, weight loss becomes even more challenging.

2 Physical Inactivity

- **Sedentary Lifestyle:** Cats that lead sedentary lives burn fewer calories, contributing to weight gain.
- **Exercise Deficit:** A lack of regular physical activity exacerbates obesity, which in turn heightens the risk of diabetes.



Steps to Safe Weight Reduction in Cats

1 Set Realistic Goals for Weight Loss

- **Vet Examination:** Always start with a thorough veterinary check-up to rule out underlying health issues, such as thyroid problems or joint issues that may affect weight loss efforts.
- **Body Condition Score (BCS):** Your vet can help you assess your cat's current BCS and establish a target weight. Review body condition chart [here](#).
- **Personalized Plan:** Every cat is different, so a personalized weight loss plan will ensure gradual and safe progress.

2 Develop a Gradual Weight Loss Plan

- **Safe Caloric Reduction:** Work with your vet to create a structured weight loss plan that reduces calories gradually.
- **Daily Energy Requirements (DER):** Your vet can calculate your cat's DER, ensuring you feed the appropriate amount to promote weight loss while maintaining health.

**Important Note: Feeding too much halts progress, while feeding too little can lead to malnutrition and other health risks.*

3 Monitor and Adjust Caloric Intake

- **Precise Portions:** Always measure or weigh your cat's food and treats to ensure accuracy. Use a baby scale to monitor gradual weight loss and ensure your cat's weight loss is on track and adjust feeding and exercise as needed.
- **Low-Calorie Treats:** Offer healthy treats like lean proteins in moderation to satisfy your cat without excess calories.
- **More Frequent, Smaller Meals:** Feeding smaller meals throughout the day can help reduce begging, increase safety, and prevent overfeeding.

4 Utilize Enrichment to Support Weight Loss

- Enrichment is meeting all an animal's mental, physical, and emotional needs to empower them to perform species-typical behaviors in healthy, safe, and appropriate ways.



Daily Exercise & Enrichment for Cats

1 Physical Play and Exercise

- Exercise is crucial for weight loss, and interactive play ensures your cat gets moving without forcing them into uncomfortable situations.
- **Solo Play:** Provide toys like ping pong balls, motorized toys, and catnip kickers for independent activity when you're not around.
- **Interactive Play:** Regular playtime (2-3 sessions per day) with wand toys, motorized toys, and feather teasers engages your cat's predatory instincts, increasing physical activity and aiding in weight loss.
 - Rotate toys regularly to maintain novelty and interest, preventing boredom-related overeating.
- **Exploration Play:** Provide vertical spaces, hiding spots, and tunnels around your home to encourage movement.
 - Climbing and jumping burn calories and help keep your cat in shape while offering mental stimulation.
- Check with your vet to adjust play to your individual cat.

2 Food-Based Enrichment

- **Food Puzzles:** Promote slower eating and portion control while encouraging natural foraging behavior. This helps prevent overeating, reduces the risk of obesity and provides an outlet for natural behavior resulting in improved emotional wellbeing.
 - Start with simple, clear puzzles to ensure your cat can successfully interact with them.
 - Start with beginner toys and gradually increase the challenge based on your cat (i.e. easter eggs, paper balls, lick mats, muffin tin). When starting, fill the puzzles with more food and place where your cat currently eats.
- **Foraging and Hunting:** Hide food in kitty condos, boxes, or around the home. This simulates the natural hunting instinct, helping with weight management through physical movement and mental stimulation.
- Gradually increase the difficulty to match your cat's skill level, promoting ongoing engagement and physical activity.
- Resources like foodpuzzlesforcats.com provide creative ideas for keeping cats active.

3 Scent Enrichment

- Encourage exploration with new scents like catnip, silvertop, and catsafe plants.
- This increases physical activity and curiosity, which helps keep your cat active, cognitively engaged, and burning calories.

4 Safe Outdoor Experiences

- Use a catio, harness, or stroller for outdoor exploration.
- **Harness Training:** With proper harness training, taking your cat for a walk can be a great way to provide both physical and mental stimulation.
- Outdoor time provides new sights and smells that stimulate curiosity and increase movement, helping with weight management.

5 Clicker Training

- Positive reinforcement training helps keep your cat active while teaching them new behaviors. Training sessions provide physical movement and mental engagement, both key to weight loss.

Patience & Consistency Are Key

- **Gradual Weight Loss:** Cats should lose weight slowly, at a safe rate of 0.5-1.0 lbs per month, to avoid health complications.
- **Family Involvement:** Engage the whole family in your cat's weight loss journey to ensure consistency with feeding and exercise routines.
- **Regular Monitoring:** Keep track of your cat's progress by weighing them regularly and adjusting their plan as needed in consultation with your vet.
- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Every small improvement in your cat's weight and activity levels is a step toward a healthier, happier life.



H-HO-064-EN-2410