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IS YOUR PET A COUCH POTATO?

Does your pet sit around all day watching soap operas and snacking between meals? Is its primary exercise waddling to the food bowl or rolling over on its back to be petted?

Too many calories and not enough exercise add up to an obese pet. And that's a problem. Fat dogs and cats suffer from the most common nutritional problem faced by pets of any age--overfeeding. Although your pet may not appear to be suffering, you could be killing it with kindness. Excess fat can lead to severe health problems. At Aladdin Animal Hospital, we see far too many digestive tract illnesses, arthritic problems, and cancers in obese pets.

Often called the "silent killer," excess fat puts strain the heart, liver, kidneys, and skeleton. By the time a pet is 10-15% overweight, the consequences become life-threatening: obese pets have shorter lifespans, a 74% greater incidence of cardiovascular problems, a 70% greater chance of arthritic, digestive and liver problems, and a 50% greater chance of getting some form of cancer than pets with normal weights. A particular problem in the Dallas area is heat stroke in fat pets due to the extreme summertime heat. Obese dogs and cats are also a significantly higher anesthetic risk.

You may think, "MY pet's not fat." Some pets may look overweight and not be, and some pets may be overweight and not show it. Here's how you can tell for yourself. Place your hands over your pet's rib cage. If you can feel the ribs easily with your fingers, your pet is lean and normal. If the ribs are difficult to find, your pet is fat. If you can't find your pet's ribs at all, your pet is dangerously obese.

Now, don't be alarmed if you discover your pet has been eating better than you thought. There's a simple solution--schedule an appointment for an evaluation by one of our doctors to make sure there isn't a medical problem that is causing the extra weight. If your pet is healthy, we will sit down with you to put together a weight reduction plan. We can accurately weigh even the largest pets on our digital walk-on scale in our lobby, and will track your pet's weight loss progress at its regular follow-up weigh-ins on our computerized medical records.

A successful weight loss program consists of reducing your pet's calorie intake, and getting it to burn more energy to work off the excess fat. There are excellent diets available for pet weight loss; we carry both the Prescription Diets line and the Purina CNM line at Aladdin Animal Hospital in canned and dry formulations for dogs and cats. Both diet lines are low in calories and high in fiber, and are formulated to satisfy your pet's appetite, and provide all nutrients your pet needs for good health.

The key to slimming down your pudgy pooch or feline fatso lies with *you*, however. Your pet isn't going to switch from a high-calorie junk food diet to a weight loss regimen without a protest. In addition, pets used to the soap opera lifestyle need encouragement to exercise or do their TaeBo. After we've checked your pet to make sure it can safely and comfortably exercise, we'll design a workout program for it. Twice daily 15 minute walks are a great place to start for overweight dogs; your cat will benefit from twice daily sessions with a string or a catnip mouse that you pull across the floor.

So get your pet off the couch and on our scale! Chances are, with a well-planned weight loss diet and exercise program, your couch potato will turn into a jumping bean!