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Weight Loss Strategies for Obese Cats

****All weight loss in obese cats must be accomplished slowly because rapid sustained weight loss by fat cats can be life threatening. Obese cats that refuse to eat for 3-4 days are at risk for developing hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver syndrome) and failing to return to their normal eating habits, even to the point of death.****

Get a digital bathroom scale that weighs out to tenths of a pound (ie : 15.4 pounds). This will allow for you to weigh yourself and then weigh yourself while holding the cat and get an accurate weight on them. You are welcome to bring them by any time and weigh them here free of charge. Weigh the cats once every 2-3 weeks and see if the changes you have made are decreasing their weight. If not, then move on to the next suggestion.



- 1) If on a routine dry cat food fed free choice then I recommend first, stopping the never ending constant food supply and switching to set amount of food provided each day and split into two meals.
 - a) Take the gross average of the food that is being consumed in a day's time for 3-4 days. Do this by putting a set **measured** amount of food out that is likely excess, like 2 cups. And then measure it at the same time the next day and see how much is left. That will tell you the rough 24 hour food consumption. Do that for 3 days so you have a decent average.
 - b) Start meal feeding the cat that same new determined amount of food split into two or three feedings a day and **measure** it out. Do NOT just guess-estimate. So, for instance, if the average was 1/2 cup of food eaten in a day's time, then start putting out 1/4 cup of food twice daily.
 - c) Now you at least can tell how many calories are being consumed in a day by the cat(s) as well as more precisely how much actual food.



- 2) For weight loss, the easiest next step is to change to a lesser calorie food. They are usually labeled for less active, or sometimes the senior diets are less calorie as well. Check online for the calorie content if it is not listed on the bag (not all indoor cat formulas are actually less calories than the average cat food, some are actually more).
 - a) Switch the foods VERY slowly in cats and they will likely take the change readily enough. I recommend slowly

changing the food over a 2-3 weeks time period – gradually adding more new and less of the old diet each day.

- b) Feed the exact same amount that you were meal feeding of the normal calorie food.
 - c) Weigh in 2-3 weeks. If you have loss, then continue to monitor weight until the loss seems to plateau at which point you can decide if you have reached the target weight.
- 3) If no change after eating only the light dry food for 4-6 weeks, then decrease the amount fed at each meal by about a fourth (25%).
- a) So, for example, if they have been getting 1 cup over a day, then put out only 3/4 cup out each day, and split it between the chosen meal times.
 - b) Weigh in 2-3 weeks. If you have loss, then continue to monitor weight until the loss seems to plateau at which point you can decide if you have reached the target.

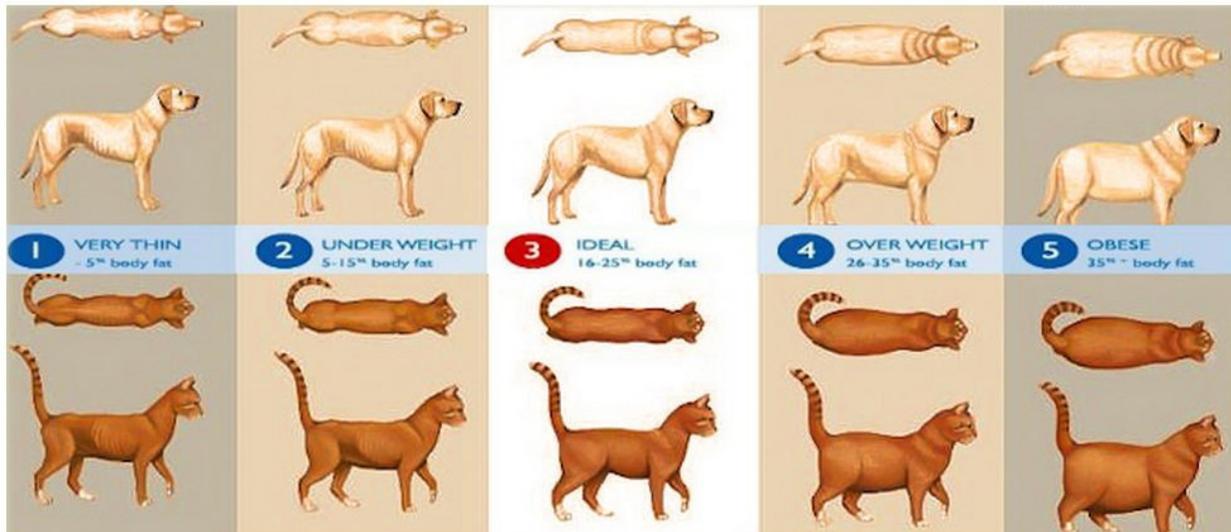
- 4) **CANNED FOOD** : If there is still no weight loss after a definite measured decrease a couple of times in a row, and 6 weeks into a lower calorie food then you may need to consider a further diet change. Some cats simply do not metabolize carbohydrates very well. Cats were intended to be carnivores almost entirely, and as such they took in far fewer carbohydrates than they are currently fed in commercial dry cat foods (which generally provide 20-30% protein and 40-60% carbohydrates). These cats sometimes require being switched to a high protein canned or dry diet (there are a few) that is in the neighborhood of 55-60% protein or higher.



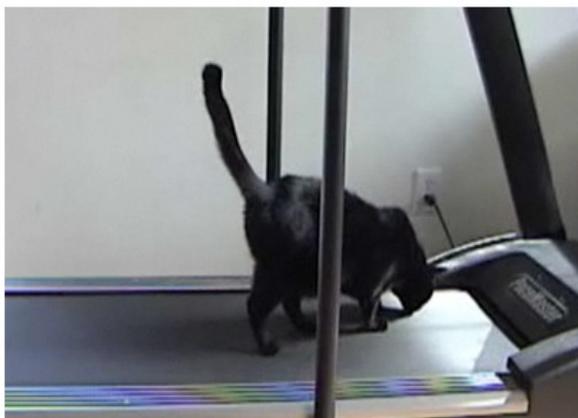
- a) TIP – realize that the ‘as fed’ percentages you get on a canned label should be adjusted for the dry matter basis. For example 24% protein content in a dry food, and 10% protein a wet food are misleading. When you adjust for the water content – the wet food is often higher in protein.
 - i) You have to know the moisture content to evaluate the percentage of protein actually in the food properly. (The formula is roughly : **Listed Protein % divided by (100-listed moisture percent) X 100**. Thus if a food was listed as 10% percent protein with 80% moisture content then : $[10 / (100-80)] \times 100 = 50\%$ protein.
 - ii) The very rough estimate way : 10-12% as fed canned is in the range of 45% protein on a dry matter basis. 12-14% as fed canned is in the range of 65% protein on a dry matter basis.
- b) Some high protein cat diets are : Hill’s m/d, Purina d/m, Wellness (Core line) dry and canned foods, Innova Evo, and Petco’s store brand Solistice line. But you can shop around with the above information and find others no doubt. These all are about 55-60% or higher protein on a dry matter basis.
- c) Base the amount of canned food on the amount of calories you have been currently feeding in dry food. Look up the information on the manufacturer’s web

site if it is not listed on the can or bag. ***If you feed excess calories you still end up with a fat cat even if you use higher protein food to do it.*** The idea is to feed the same amount of calories but change the percentage of protein versus carbs.

- d) Do not worry about the canned food and the cat's teeth. The fact is there are many cats with awful teeth that have eaten dry food their entire lives. We have come to realize that genetics and the predisposition toward periodontal disease has a great deal more to do with the oral health of the individual cat than whether the food choice is dry or canned.



5) **WET THE DRY FOOD** : Do your cats hate canned food, or do you hate canned food? Then you should consider wetting the dry food allotment you are giving twice daily. Simply soak the food and then drain it and put it down for the cats immediately. The aim is not to make soft food of it but to simply add water to the meal. A very recent study showed this had remarkably similar results regarding weight gain and maintenance as canned food diets alone did. If the cats begin to eat less at each feeding, then simply cut back the food slightly at each feeding until it all equals out again.



6) **EXERCISE** : The same facts hold true for cats as any other creature – there is only so much weight loss that can be achieved with diet alone. You must try and increase the cat's activity levels for a significant amount each week. They get fat in part because they are less active as they age and so their calorie requirements decrease but they continue eating the same amount. Obesity then becomes a self fulfilling prophecy – they get fat because they are less active, and the fatter they are the less active they feel like

being. Routinely we hear that obviously obese cats become much more active and 'kitten-like' when their owners succeed in decreasing their weight.

1. Get them to play. Do they like toys ? Go get them some. Try motorized balls, try the balls in a 'batting' circle, throw toys for them to retrieve and attack, use the fishing pole toys to tease them while you watch tv. Aim to increase their activity for 15 minutes 3-4 times a week.
2. Consider getting the little cheap laser light toys, most cats can be encouraged to start 'hunting' those and is easily doable while you watch tv. You can 'hide' the laser bug under the couch and many will keep hunting it for several minutes even when you are done.
3. Do they show no interest in playing but they adore food? Teach them to 'hunt' their food. Very easy if you have no dogs, but if you do, consider whether you can baby gate off some areas such that the cat can scoot under or over the gate and the dog cannot. Or play the hide game with the cats on counters that the dog cannot reach or gain access to.
 - a. Very slowly start to move some of their allotted portion of the day's food away from the main feeding area so that they start to 'grasp' that the food may not all be in the same place every feeding.
 - b.
 - c. Aim to break up the little 'found meals' into small treat like portions that encourage the cat to walk the length of the house in search of them. This is actually normal behavior for cats – to have to hunt down small frequent meals.
 - d. Also alter the time of the day that you put out the 'found' meals for them to search for, so that it becomes a habit for them to hunt and find at any time of the day. I have had one person that used timed food dishes and simply put them in various parts of the house and periodically changed the release time for the food as well.
4. Do they like treats? Use treats or bits of kibble for food reward cats and encourage them to 'work for it'. Let them see and smell their favorite treat and then pitch it down the hall for them to run after. They will expend more energy running after a single treat than they would have eating several you place right in front of them.

