

## The truth about cats, dogs & food

Follow these tips to avoid obesity and keep your pet happy and healthy

The West Australian · 21 May 2021 · 7 · Jade Jurewicz

As the days grow colder and darker the desire to pound the pavement with pets isn't as enticing as it is in summer, but new research reveals exercise is as important as ever for them this winter.



According to Hill's Pet Nutrition Australia, more than 50 per cent of Australian pets are overweight and 90 per cent of pet parents don't realise their pet has a weight issue.

And while pet obesity is common, it is preventable.

Dr Jessica Mills, a consulting veterinarian, shares the most effective ways to watch a pet's weight to ensure it's happy and healthy.

### STARTING POINT

Every breed and species of pet will have a healthy weight range, so it is important to know what its ideal number is.

Dr Mills says to start a health file for your pet with the starting weight to keep tabs of any loss or gains.

### CALCULATE CALORIES

As with humans, Dr Mills says the feeding guides on food packages are just that, guides, and for each pet its breed, weight, age and activity level should be considered.

She says your local vet can help determine ideal weight and energy requirements.

#### QUALITY DIET

Not only will a nutritious diet assist with weight management, it will make a difference in your pet's lifelong health and happiness, Dr Mills says.

A balanced diet contributes to healthy digestion, strong bones and a beautiful coat.

#### MEASURE MEALS

When you speak to your vet about your pet's ideal weight range and energy levels, ask about how much you should be feeding it.

Dr Mills says while some owners think they're doing their pet a favour keeping its bowl full all day, they may be contributing to the extra kilos.

#### SWITCH OUT TREATS

While treating your pet to some scraps off your plate may not seem like a big deal, Dr Mills says 28g of cheddar cheese is the equivalent of 1.5 burgers for a 9kg dog, or 3.5 burgers for a 4.5kg cat.

She encourages owners to reward good behaviour with fun, and not food, whether that be extra cuddles, walks or playtime.

#### GET PHYSICAL

For your dog, an extra walk each week, lengthening the walk or upping the intensity by adding hills or stairs will do wonders.

Dr Mills says for cats you can get more creative, such as using a torchlight on the floor for them to chase or dividing their meal across the home for them to search and find.

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#### SLOW AND STEADY

It is important to remember, says Dr Mills, there's no quick fix. Healthy weight management for a cat or dog will be a lifestyle change.

But by utilising healthy habits early it will give it a better chance to live a long and happy life.