

## Feline Obesity - A Growing Concern

Obesity in cats is a growing concern. In fact, 25 to 30 percent of pet cats seen by veterinarians these days are overweight. The condition seems to be more prevalent today than it was 20 years ago, primarily because of differences in lifestyle and feeding. A large number of cats are exclusively indoor pets who are rarely called upon to defend their territory, stalk their prey or do little more than beg for their next meal.

Boredom is also a culprit, and good-tasting cat food is a never-ending temptation to a cat with little else to do. And the higher the fat and calorie content of the food, the greater the risk for obesity.

All cats have the potential to become overweight, but the problem appears to be more prevalent in mixed-breed cats. The highest incidence appears in neutered, middle-aged, six-to-eleven-year-old male cats.

There are a number of theories why neutered cats are more prone to obesity than intact ones. The removal of reproductive organs alters the hormonal balance and causes metabolic changes. Also, cats are usually neutered in late kittenhood or early adulthood a time when energy requirements are declining but owners may fail to make appropriate dietary adjustments. Finally, neutering tends to curb certain cat behaviors, such as roaming and fighting, resulting in yet another decline in activity. In fact, surveys of overweight cats show they tend to be very inactive and sleep up to 18 hours a day.

What are the dangers of obesity? Preliminary studies indicate that overweight cats are more likely to develop diabetes mellitus, skin problems, lameness due to arthritis and feline hepatic lipidosis (an accumulation of fat cells that impairs liver function).

How do I diagnose an obese cat?

Obesity is typically defined as 20 to 25 percent over the cat's ideal body weight (for example, an extra 2.5 pounds may not sound like much, but it can be an enormous burden to a cat whose ideal weight is 10 pounds). To determine whether your cat is obese, you first have to determine your cat's ideal body condition. The best method is to look at his profile and feel his body.

Overfed: Ribs are difficult to feel. Waist and abdominal tuck is absent or barely visible.

Underfed: Ribs are easily felt and pelvic bones may be prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.

Ideal: You should be able to feel your cat's ribs, but not see them. The view from above should reveal an hourglass figure. The cat has a slight indentation at the waist beginning at the back of the ribs to just before the hips. In profile, the cat should have a slight tummy tuck beginning just behind the last ribs and going up into the hind legs.

What you can do about feline obesity

Always consult your veterinarian before placing your cat on a diet. Weight loss should be done slowly and with great care, or you could be putting your cat's health in jeopardy. Try eliminating treats and slightly reducing the amount of your cat's regular food. Then, divide his new, reduced daily food allotment into four or five small meals to keep him from feeling deprived. Multiple small meals also tend to increase his metabolic rate, which can help your tubby tabby slim down. Switching your cat to a lower-calorie, lower-fat diet is another option.

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### About the Author

Tristan Andrews writes useful articles about cats and kittens. Discover and explore the feline world. Find out how to better care for, train and live with your cat at the cat forums at <http://www.i-love-cats.com>