



APONC HEALTH NEWSLETTER

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In this Issue

In February we continue our focus on weight loss in dogs – a condition that Cornell veterinary believes to be a big health conditions in dogs. And our PONs are certainly no exception! This article provides additional information on techniques that can be used to address obesity and weight loss. We hope that you find some helpful tips. This article is being reproduced with permission from the Cornell Richard P. Riney Canine Health Center.

The Biggest Health Problem in Canine Medicine: Obesity

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When veterinary students are asked what the number one disease that dogs will present with to their clinics, many will say GI disease or skin disease, while in reality it is malnutrition in the form of obesity. The Association of Pet Obesity Prevention now has the prevalence of dogs who are overweight to obese at approximately 60 percent of the pet population, nearly mimicking human rates of obesity. Having been involved in nutrition for over 25 years now, I recognize that this is one of the hardest conditions to treat in veterinary medicine. The discussion with clients about weight management can be challenging in the busy day of many veterinarians. Below are some tips and strategies to handle the problem as well as some pitfalls that can be avoided in combating this emerging crisis in canine health care.

Tip 1: Limit the Treats!

Many of us love to offer our dog a treat when we walk in the door and see a wagging tail or after a good old-fashioned walk around the block. Treats equal calories, and there is nothing more effective in combatting obesity than calorie counting. The treat world is enormous, with the producers of small fingernail size treats to large biscuits, rawhides, pizzle sticks, dehydrated meat slabs and chewy treats all claiming how much your dog will enjoy these morsels. We also have the problem of table foods that we love to give as well. It has been estimated that the average person is feeding around 20 percent of the calories that a dog needs through these treats and table scraps. The bottom line is that all of these treats will have somewhere between 7 - 150 kcals each, and the quantity needs to be curbed during weight loss. My motto is, "If it's not a veggie, then it shouldn't cross their lips." Vegetables such as green beans, small baby carrots and bell pepper will have 5 kcals or less per slice or piece when chopped up and can be good substitutes for those who feel "Food equals Love." Try to portion out 4-5 pieces a day that can serve as those rewards, and if you are giving more than this, they should be allocated towards the total calories that your dog is allowed each day.

Tip 2: Understand how many calories your dog needs to lose weight!

An age-old problem is how to calculate the appropriate caloric needs for weight loss. Studies have shown that you can achieve productive weight loss over a six-month period of calorie restriction. But what is a safe and kind number to allow food consumption and to get productive weight loss? Long ago after doing a study, I realized that the productive number to get between 1-3 percent weight loss over that period of time was 55 (kg metabolic body weight)^{0.75}. This seems complicated but can be calculated on a typical phone calculator.

- First, ask your veterinarian to suggest an ideal body weight for your dog. Turn your phone on the side so that the calculator expands to have more functions. Then enter the ideal weight of your dog in kilograms; if you have the weight in pounds, divide pounds by 2.2 to obtain the weight in kilograms (kg). Then tap the “Xy” key, type in 0.75, and then tap the “=” sign. For a 30 kg dog we get 12.82. Then multiply that number in your phone by 50 to give you the number of calories needed for weight loss. In the case of the dog that is 30 kg, the final number you get is 630 calories. That is the target for productive weight loss that you need to feed. This will allow 95 percent of dogs to lose weight productively. There are typically 5 percent of dogs that I like to say, “live on air,” and if you have a dog like this then your dog may need to be screened for possible endocrine (hormonal) conditions before restricting calories further. It’s always a good idea to confirm your calculations with your veterinarian.

Calculating caloric requirements for weight loss:

Open your phone’s calculator app. Turn your phone on its side.

Enter your dog’s ideal weight in kilograms

Tap the “xy” key

Then type in 0.75 and hit the “=” key

Multiply that number by 50 to reveal the calories your dog should eat to lose weight

Tip 3: Feed your dog an appropriate food!

Many dog owners will try to feed an over-the-counter food that is deemed “low fat, lean, or lite.” These terms on a bag of dog food mean something, while foods that say “obesity management” or “healthy weight” actually mean nothing. The American Association of Feed Control Officials -- which is the body that regulates pet food in every state -- regulates the use of those words to foods that are truly fat restricted, while the other terms are often nothing more than marketing.

- **Option #1: Over-the-counter diets**
 - Look for the lowest calorie food per cup that you can find.
 - Dry foods should contain 30 percent protein or greater on the bag, with fat content eight percent or lower.
 - Canned foods should contain around eight percent or higher for protein, with fat at around two percent or lower.
 - Unfortunately, these foods are not really designed for weight loss and may shortchange your dog on vitamins and minerals, as well as protein.
 - If an over-the-counter food from the local pet store is being used to reduce calorie intake, I often recommend that owners provide a complete human multivitamin at about ¼ tablet per 10 lbs body weight. This ensures adequate vitamin and trace mineral intake during the weight loss protocol since B vitamins are part of the processes involved in metabolism.
- **Option #2: Veterinary therapeutic diets**
 - Sold under veterinary guidance

- These therapeutic diets are not only designed for weight loss with higher vitamin and mineral content but are also enriched with more protein to ensure adequacy during weight loss.

Tip 4: When the going is rough – try a home prepared food plan for the weight loss win!

- Feeding home prepared diets can be a bit confusing and worrisome as to whether you are doing it correctly. After many years of attempting weight loss programs using commercial dog foods, I find that they are sometimes still too calorie dense, and many owners hate the idea of feeding so little.
- When dogs are not losing weight appropriately on the commercial diet plans, I move to home prepared diets for two reasons: first, I get to feed more volume in general, and second, I can feed higher protein in the diet plan -- particularly for the older dog. Just like with humans, older dogs need about 50 percent more protein in the diet than younger dogs to retain lean body mass (muscle!). When feeding commercial foods and restricting calories, many dogs will be getting 1.5-2-5 grams of protein per kilogram of ideal body weight, and it is optimal for older dogs to be getting closer to three grams of protein per kilogram of ideal body weight.
- The easy-to-follow recipe below provides optimal protein and includes a vitamin/mineral mix that can be used to provide all the nutrients they need to lose weight productively. As you can see, it is vegetable rich and is based on 200 kcals of consumption. So, for the mini-Yorkshire terrier you can cut this recipe in half, and for the Labrador that needs 600 kcals for weight loss you can triple the recipe.
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Food Source and supplement per 200 Calories	Weight
Roasted or baked Chicken breast or 99% lean ground turkey	4 ounces (115 grams)
½ cup of frozen or fresh cooked green beans, squash, carrots or broccoli	2 ounces (65 grams)
½ packed scoop of Annamaet Enhance OR 1 tsp of Balanceit carnivore blend	2 grams OR 4 grams
Total Kcals approximately 200 Calories	About 190 grams total

The supplements can be found online for Annamaet Enhance or at Balanceit.com for the Carnivore Blend.

Tip 5: Take a walk!

Providing exercise for your dog while juggling a hectic schedule can be challenging. Although activity such as a long walk can help with weight loss, it plays a relatively minor part in the overall equation. Human studies suggest a minimum of 60 minutes per day of vigorous activity. Many owners have a hard time providing that level of activity, but if you can, it will only help the situation. Additionally, many obese dogs are older and may not hold up well during exercise due to other medical issues.

Although we have no firm data on what activity level is ideal, it was found that with the equivalent of a two-mile daily walk, dogs could eat 10 percent more calories per day while achieving successful weight loss compared to dogs that were not active. These dogs could eat about 3-4 more calories per kilogram body weight which is only 100 calories per day for the average Labrador -- so providing treats after the walk can actually negate the positive effect of the walk on weight loss. Other studies have shown that the muscle mass in dogs is retained better if they are undergoing exercise or rehabilitation programs during weight loss.

Hopefully these tips can get everyone moving in the right direction to achieve weight loss for their dogs and -- who knows -- maybe the increase in vegetables and activity will provide inspiration for better health for their owners as well!



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