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## **Help Your Pet Lose Winter Weight Gain**

The snow is gone. The birds are singing. And, people and pets are starting to come out of their winter hibernation. As pets come into The Zimmerman Veterinary Clinic for their spring physical exam, several are carrying a few extra pounds due to inactivity and too many calories this winter. What does extra weight mean for your pet?

- Extra weight can put stress on your pet's joints, which speeds up arthritis and makes it very difficult for older pets to get around.
- A weight rollercoaster from winter to summer each year, which can be detrimental to pet health.
- Weight gain carried from one year to the next, so pets continuously are heavier as years pass.

### **Is My Pet Overweight?**

When evaluating your pet's weight you should be able to feel their ribs easily, but not see them. You should also see an abdominal tuck when looking down at them. This means you should see a waistline. Purina has some good resources for pet owners:

<http://www.purina.com/dog/weight-and-exercise/bodycondition.aspx>

Before starting any weight loss plan, your pet should receive a physical examination from your veterinarian and a customized weight loss plan. With older pets, blood testing may be needed to make sure there is not any internal problems such as hypothyroidism, which could be causing the weight gain. Pets should not lose more than 2% of their weight per month. For a 50 lb. dog this is 1 lb. per month.

### **Measured Feeding**

Pets should receive a measured amount of food per day. Making food available free-choice, or all the time creates an unlimited buffet for your pet, which leads to weight gain. Be sure to only in measure increments feed pets at meal.

If you have more than one pet, be sure each pet is eating their own food. It may be easiest to keep them in separate rooms when feeding them and put the food dishes away after feeding. Your pet's food should be measured for the weight you want them to be at, not the current weight to achieve weight loss. A veterinarian can calculate your pet's exact calorie requirements for weight loss.

### **Limit Treats & Scrap Foods**

Treats and table scraps are often times the major culprit of pet weight gain, especially during inactive months of the winter. These calories need to be kept to a minimum to achieve weight loss. Check the nutrition information on the bag of treats. Many treats can be 50-100 Calories or more. Rawhides, pig ears and other chews that are eaten are usually high in calories.

### **Don't Give In**

Pets know how to receive what they want. Find other ways to spoil your pet such as play, grooming and other one-on-one activity. Pets need balanced meals just like people and giving in to too many treats and people food is like letting your kids eat candy bars for dinner. Keep low calorie snacks like carrots on

hand, if you feel the need to give your pet a treat. Feeding is just the start. Many pets do not receive adequate exercise. Exercise is more than just letting your pet outside to roam in the yard for awhile. If you do not have time to exercise your pet, consider dog day care.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.