

Weight Reduction
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We've not only done it to ourselves but it appears that we have done it to our dogs. Research collected from a large survey of private veterinary practices in the United States revealed that 25% of the dogs presented were either overweight or obese. An overweight dog is defined as one that is anywhere from ten to nineteen percent above its optimal body weight while an obese dog is one that is twenty percent or more above its optimal body weight.

Obesity in dogs, just as in humans can lead to many physical problems. Therefore, as conscientious dog owners we should strive to maintain a canine companion that is in good physical form. However, if our canine friend's overindulgence has already made it part of the above statistic it is important that we do what we can to correct the problem before it gets any worse.

The most obvious cause of canine obesity is insufficient exercise, overfeeding or a combination thereof. For a dog that is beyond its growth stage the amount of food it needs on a daily basis is a reflection of the energy his body needs to maintain normal physiological functions, produce voluntary muscular activity, efficiently digest and absorb food and maintain normal body temperature in extreme environments. Puppies and lactating females will also require calories or energy for tissue growth and/or lactation. When we provide our dogs with more calories than they need to perform these functions it results in a positive energy balance. Maintaining a positive energy balance over extended periods of time will lead to obesity.

Most dog owners only become aware of the effects of a protracted positive energy balance when it manifests itself physically. They may begin to provide their dog with longer periods of daily exercise to assist in taking off the excess weight. This is a good first step in that the increased exercise increases the energy needed for voluntary muscular activity and will work to reduce any positive energy imbalance.

The second part of the weight loss equation is change in diet. Unfortunately, this is where many owners can fall victim to faulty logic. That faulty logic makes the assumption that increased exercise along with a corresponding reduction in their dog's daily ration will produce the desired weight loss results.

While on the surface reducing the quantity of the food currently being provided makes sense, there is actually more to the science of digestion than meets the eye. There are basically three reasons why a reduction in the amount of food currently being fed will provide less than optimal results in a weight loss plan.

Most maintenance diets, or diets that are designed to maintain an animal's weight, contain more fat than those that are designed for weight reduction. Fat has two and a quarter times more calories than an equivalent weight of carbohydrates or proteins. In

addition, fat is digested very efficiently. The more efficiently something is digested the less energy or calories the body burns in performing the process of digestion. So, the fact that a dog's body is efficient at digesting fat can be a contributing factor to the animal's weight gain problem. Given this, when the goal is weight reduction it makes sense to feed a diet that obtains fewer calories from fat sources.

The second reason why a reduction in the current food being fed will not produce optimal weight loss results is that the digestion of food is inversely proportional to the amount that is eaten. In other words, the less of something we eat the better we become at digesting it and extracting energy (calories) from it. While this would certainly be a positive attribute in relation to underfeeding it obviously presents a challenge when the goal is weight reduction.

Lastly, the goal in reducing the quantity of the food that you feed is to decrease total caloric intake so that it will lead to weight reduction. Most of the dry and canned foods that we purchase for our animals are nutritionally balanced. This means that they provide the correct ratios of nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Decreasing the amount of a food that is currently being fed will not only reduce caloric intake but also the intake of vitamins and other minerals that are necessary to maintain normal physiological functions. Over time this can lead to additional health problems.

The problem of canine obesity is very real in this country. A pet that is overweight or obese can become the victim of serious health problems and a reduced life expectancy. Since our canine companions count on us to give them the care that they need we owe it to them to do all that we can to eliminate the problem.

An increase in daily activity is the first and easiest step to a healthier and leaner pooch. One way you can increase your dog's daily activity is through training. Obedience training can be incorporated in games that can provide additional exercise for your dog. If your pooch is already overweight use good judgment in developing an exercise regiment. Don't do too much too fast rather gradually increase the amount of time spent exercising each day. The great thing about it is that you too will enjoy the benefit of the increased activity.

With respect to diet, speak to your veterinarian. He or she will be able to tell you the appropriate amount of calories that your dog should be getting on a daily basis. Through a thorough physical exam they will be able to determine if your pet's excess weight might be the result of any physical issues. Lastly, they will be able to recommend a food that is nutritionally complete and balanced for your companion.

About the Author: Charlie Petrizzo, certified dog trainer, has worked with dogs and horses for more than twenty years. He trains dogs for private clients and breeds and trains Labrador retrievers for children with disabilities. He earned a bachelor's degree from St. John's University in New York, a diploma from The Animal Behavior College and an advanced diploma in canine fitness and nutrition from the Companion Animal Sciences Institute. His personal story, including recovery from two life altering accidents that left him temporarily paralyzed and permanently scarred from burns over two thirds of his body, is truly inspirational. Charlie is a dynamic and motivational speaker. His website is www.circleoflifedogtraining.com. He can be reached at ak9nose@earthlink.net.