

How to get your dog in shape

Weight loss is tough for anyone—two- or four-legged. But losing weight and getting in shape not only adds years to your pet's life, it can also make those extra years more enjoyable.

Why a healthy weight is important for your dog

If a dog is just five pounds over its ideal weight, it's at risk for developing some serious medical conditions. When a dog is overweight or obese, it's not a question of if it will develop a related illness, but rather how many and how soon.

Veterinarians expect overweight dogs to live shorter lives than their fitter counterparts. Heavy dogs tend to be less energetic and playful. It's common to think dogs that lie around are just lazy, making it easy to overlook the lethargy that results from being overweight or obese. If your dog doesn't run and jump, it might be overweight. But don't worry, your veterinary team can help your pooch get in shape!

Start with calories

A weight-loss formula seems simple: fewer calories, in plus more calories, out equals weight loss. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. First, never put your dog on a diet until it's been examined by your veterinarian. A medical condition may be causing your dog's excess weight. The veterinarian will rule out these diseases before putting your dog on a diet.

Once the veterinarian prescribes a diet, the next step is calculating the calories your dog needs. First, the veterinarian will calculate your dog's ideal weight. Your veterinarian will use your dog's initial target or ideal weight to figure out how many calories your dog should eat each day. To figure out how many calories are in your pet's food, check the label. If it doesn't tell you what you need to know, ask your veterinarian.

The art of changing foods

You'll most likely need to offer your dog a diet food if it's overweight. When you're introducing a new food, allow several days for the transition. We recommend



gradually adding the new diet over a one- to two-week period. Start by substituting one-quarter of your dog's diet with the new food for two or three days. Then give your dog a diet that's half old food, half new for the next two to four days. Then increase to feeding three-quarters new food for the final three to five days before completely switching to the new diet. To make dry food more appetizing for your dog, try warming the food, adding ketchup or oregano, or even adding a splash of an omega-3 fatty acid supplement or salmon juice on top of the food.