

Feeding Guidelines for the foods we carry at Bend Pet Express

by Barbara Troyer

What food should I feed if my pet is overweight?

Obesity is as much of a health problem for companion animals as it is for humans—yet many owners are guilty of overfeeding their pets. Being overweight can shorten a pet's life by contributing to diabetes, heart and liver problems, arthritis, bladder cancer, and skin disorders, and it can put a pet at higher risk while undergoing anesthesia and surgery. Any animal will gain body weight if it consumes more calories than it burns as fuel for energy. The first step is to figure out why your pet is overweight by checking with your vet to rule out or treat illnesses that may cause weight gain. Healthy pets may overeat and become fat when their nutritional needs aren't being met or to express dominance over other pets in the household.



Watch out for the treats you're feeding as well. Many owners shower their pets with treats, and inadvertently increase their calorie consumption greatly. Try breaking treats into smaller pieces and giving them less often. Or if your pet eats kibble, use a portion of the daily meal as treats.

How do I tell if my pet is overweight?

Ask your veterinarian what the appropriate weight should be for your pet. Then weigh them regularly. Another way to determine if your pet is at a healthy weight is to take a close look at them. Of course this will vary from breed to breed, but in general, when looking down from above, a pet at a good weight should have a noticeable "waist" behind the ribs. The ribs should be palpable without excess fat covering (you should be able to see the last two ribs). An abdominal tuck should be evident when viewed from the side.

Should I choose a "lite" food or other special food?

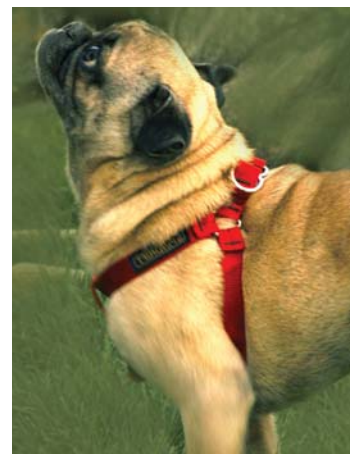
"Lite" foods are marketed to address the pet obesity problem. A "lite" food generally contains lesser levels of fat and/or protein than comparable food manufactured by the same company. Even so, a "lite" food can cause weight gain if overfed. A pet food can claim to be "light," "lite," "low calorie," "low fat," or "lean" only if it meets the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) standard definitions for these terms. These definitions differ for dog and cat food and also depend on the moisture content of the food. We have found that in many cases, portion control of a good quality food may work better than feeding a "lite" food as your animal will feel more satisfied, rather than eating more to compensate for increased carbohydrate intake. We now also offer several pet foods with high protein levels and no grains, which may assist some pets in maintaining a healthy weight. Of course, keep in mind that nutritional needs vary by species, breed, age, health, and activity level.

Portion Control

Feeding directions on pet foods provide only broad recommendations, not required amounts, and the amounts listed tend to be on the high side. So how much should you feed? We generally recommend that you use portion control (set number of measured meals per day) to feed your companion animals, rather than free feeding (leaving the bowl out all day). Controlling portions not only lets you know how much your pet is eating, it also alerts you right away if your pet becomes ill and stops eating—this is especially important for

cats. Long term fasting can predispose cats to a potentially fatal disease called hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease) so if your cat does not eat for two days in a row it's a good idea to take them to your veterinarian.

Ideally, with portion control, you will know how much your animal weighs. (You are welcome to weigh your pet at The Holistic Clinic, which shares a building with our Eastside store). Look at the recommended daily portions per weight listed on the bag or can of food you are feeding: see Figure 1 (next page) as an example. Both the weight and the portion will be a range and you will have to experiment a little bit to see what will work for your pet. You can then decide how many times a day you are willing to feed your animals. A twice-daily schedule works well for many people, and although it may seem time-consuming, once you get into the habit it really doesn't take that much longer—you can do it! If you know how much your pet weighs and then consult the feeding chart, you have a range to start with. It's a good idea to start out at the low end of the portion range. Take the daily portion and divide it into two. So, if Ben weighs 20 pounds, then a good place to start with Ben's daily portion is 1 cup. Ben would get ½ cup at each meal. It is important to use an actual measuring cup to be accurate



(we have measuring cups here if you need one). Leave the food down for 10-20 minutes and if your pet doesn't finish within that time period, pick it up and try again the next meal. It only takes most pets (even those that have been free-fed for years) a few meal times before they realize that they better eat when it's time or they'll have to wait for the next meal.

FEEDING GUIDELINES

CURRENT WEIGHT(LBS)	DAILY CUPS TO BE FED BY WEIGHT
	(ADULT)
3-10	¼ - ¾
10-20	¾ - 1
20-30	1 - 1 ½
30-40	1 ½ - 1 ¾
40-60	1 ¾ - 2 ¼
60-80	2 ¼ - 2 ¾
80-100	2 ¾ - 3 ¼

Figure 1 – Adult Feeding Guidelines Example

If you have the opposite problem and your pet gulps it down in three seconds and then looks at you with those big sad eyes, or acts constantly like it is starving—be strong and don't give in.

You're in charge and you're doing it for their health. One way to slow them down and make the meal last a little longer is to add water to the bowl. This is an excellent way to get some extra moisture into them and even works with cats, who notoriously don't drink enough



Photo by Lorna Hickerson

water on their own. After a week or two you will be able to determine if you are feeding too much or too little food by your animal's weight and general body shape. If they are gaining weight, cut back, if they are losing, add a little. Even as little as adding or removing 10 kibbles at a time can make a difference. This method of feeding also works well with multiple pet households, as you can determine how much each individual animal is eating.

How do I avoid causing intestinal upset like diarrhea in my pet?

Transitioning slowly to the new food over a week will help to avoid intestinal upset like diarrhea or vomiting. Start with ¼ new food to ¾ old. Feed those amounts for a few days. If all is well, transition to ½ new, ½ old and feed for a few days. Gradually transition to feeding

100% of the new food. If you see any signs of upset along the way, go back to less of the new food, more of the old for a few days.

	New Food	Old Food
Days 1-2	25%	75%
Days 3-4	50%	50%
Days 5-6	75%	25%
Day 7	100%	

Figure 2 – Food Transition Example

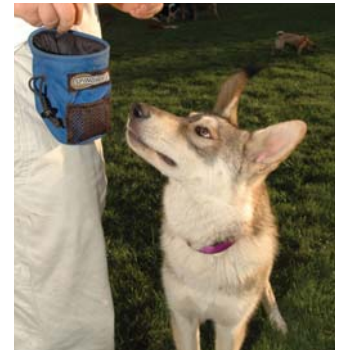
Overfeeding can also be the cause of diarrhea or other digestive upset. When more of a nutrient dense food is taken in than your pet's system can process, the result will be expelled as waste. When switching from some foods sold at grocery stores, chain pet stores, and vet clinics to the foods that we sell, owners have a tendency to want to keep feeding the same amount of the new food as the old food. However, because the new food is so calorie rich and feeding amounts are being exceeded, this tactic is bound to lead to upset digestion. It is important to feed an appropriate amount for the target weight of your animal according to the feeding guidelines for the food you're feeding.

Another way to keep your pet's digestive system healthy is to supplement with probiotics, digestive enzymes, and prebiotics. Probiotics (live or active cultures) are "good" bacteria that are beneficial to good intestinal health. Live cultures can be found in many commercially available yogurts —add a teaspoon or so once in a while to your pet's food to reintroduce these beneficial cultures to their system. Digestive plant-based enzymes process fats, carbohydrates,

and protein, easing the burden placed on the digestive system—and are easily destroyed by the normal processing of commercial pet food. Prebiotics feed the beneficial bacteria that naturally replenish these essential enzymes. One way to introduce digestive enzymes and prebiotics to your pet's system is as a supplemental powder that is added daily to meals.

For diarrhea, constipation, or hairballs, canned pumpkin is a good natural source of fiber. Add a teaspoon or so to your pet's food as needed. Even cats seem to like the taste. Be sure to buy plain canned pumpkin, not sweetened pumpkin pie mix. For extreme cases of diarrhea, fasting your pet on liquids for 24 hours is an option that allows the system to rest and heal, rather than trying to digest food.

Please feel free to ask any Bend Pet Express staff member if you have any questions that we haven't covered here. Of course, the information, experience, and opinions we offer shouldn't be a substitute for a visit to your animal's veterinarian.



References:

AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials): <http://www.aafco.org>

Cat Nutrition: <http://www.moggies.co.uk/articles/nutrition.html>

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Overweight Pet, The: <http://www.thepetcenter.com/imtop/overweight.html>

Pet Food: The Lowdown on Labels: http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2001/301_pet.html

VetInfo: A Veterinary Information Service: <http://www.vetinfo.com>