

More than 60% of the UK dog population is overweight (British Veterinary Association).

As with humans, obesity in dogs has been proven to have severe health implications which can reduce their quality of life. Not only can it exacerbate joint disease, heart issues and cause diabetes, but it can also make more difficult what we, as vets, would consider otherwise routine general anaesthetics and surgeries, and therefore more risky.

It's a common misconception that a dog's condition can be judged simply by its weight.

In the veterinary profession, we use a scale from 1-5 to judge a dog's body condition. However, dogs can be many shapes and sizes depending on the breed and so a more accurate judgement of body condition score has been created to measure a number of factors including prominence of ribs, waistline and tummy tuck.

Judging correct body condition score from 1-5

1. **Very thin** – Ribs very prominent and easily felt with no fat cover
2. **Underweight** – Ribs can be visualised and are raised to the touch with backbone and hip bones just visible
3. **Ideal weight** – Ribs are visible and easily felt with a noticeable tummy tuck.
4. **Overweight** – Ribs are not visible but can be felt. Minor tummy tuck
5. **Obese** – Ribs are impossible to feel, no waistline and tummy bulges outwards/downwards

There is some breed variation with what body condition score is ideal - for example, a Greyhound or Lurcher would preferably be between 2 and 3, whereas a Labrador would ideally be BCS 3.

Tips for weight loss

Any strategy to lower your dog's body condition score can be split into three approaches: Diet, exercise and regular monitoring.

Diet

When trying to regulate the diet, it is very important to maintain consistency. Ideally, your dog will be fed the same amount at similar times by the same person each day. This will help reduce the variability in the amount of food given and reduce the chance of feeding twice!

Weighing food helps to guarantee consistency whilst allowing for fine adjustments to the daily food intake to ensure that you can safely and consistently reduce feed intake (it is not advised to reduce the quantity of any diet by more than 20% a month).

Try to cut out leftovers and unhealthy "treats" from your dog's diet. **Instead, crunchy vegetables, such as carrots or cucumber can be used as a treat.** If feeding a dry diet, you can set aside a small portion of their daily allowance to use as treats throughout the day.

Exercise

The greater the duration of your dog's daily exercise, the lower risk of it suffering from obesity. Especially in the winter months it can perhaps be less tempting to take your pet out for a walk in the evenings but the exercise will make a huge difference to your dog.



Regular Monitoring

When putting your dog on a diet, it is always a good idea to keep an accurate and up-to-date record of its weight. This ensures you have an accurate record of weight loss and you are tracking any progress to that end. You are always welcome to call in and use the weighing scales at any of our branches.

If you would like any further advice please do not hesitate to contact us or, alternatively, arrange a clinic appointment with one of our Registered Veterinary Nurses.