10 Tips for Helping Your Dog Lose Weight

Lean dogs live longer, healthier lives than those who are overweight. Health problems that are more common in overweight dogs include diabetes, heart disease, joint disease, and even cancer. If you can’t easily feel your dog’s ribs or there’s a roll of fat at the base of her tail, your dog may be overweight. Check with your veterinarian to find out if your dog should be on a diet.

Many commercial weight loss diets are high in carbohydrates and low in fat and protein - this is not the best way to help dogs to lose weight. Protein and carbohydrates supply the same number of calories, but protein is used to build lean muscle, while carbs are more likely to be stored as body fat.

The scale at your veterinarian’s office is ideal for weighing your dog; it will give the most accurate weight.

Canned foods are usually higher in protein and lower in carbs than dry foods. For canned foods, subtract the moisture percentage from 100, then look for protein that is at least one third the remainder, and fat that is one quarter the remainder or a little less. If you are feeding dry food, look for a minimum of 25 percent protein.

Reduce the amount you feed gradually rather than making drastic changes all at once. Slow, steady weight loss is more likely to result in long-term success.

If you continue to use the same food you’re feeding now, start by reducing the amount by about 5 percent. Weigh your dog in one to two weeks. If your dog has not lost weight, reduce the amount of food by another 5 percent. Continue to reduce the amount of food you feed every week or two until your dog begins to lose weight, then continue feeding that amount.

It’s critical to accurately measure the amount of food that you feed to achieve consistent weight control.

Dogs care more about the number of treats they get than the size of each treat: it’s more rewarding for a dog to receive several small treats than one big one. Avoid treats that are high in fat and calories, such as cheese and hot dogs. Crunchy, raw vegetables like carrots or broccoli are a good substitute.

Try writing down every piece of food that your dog gets in a week, including from other family members. You may be surprised at what you find.

Regular exercise is also an essential component of a successful dog weight-loss program. Start out with a couple of ten minute walks per day and gradually work up to a faster pace and longer hikes.

If your dog still doesn’t lose weight, check with your veterinarian to make sure it is not a medical problem like hypothyroidism.