

## TIPS TO KEEP YOUR DOG HEALTHY & HAPPY

Included are some useful tips and resources on weight, feeding, and exercise. Please note, these are general guidelines and should not be a substitute for a discussion with your veterinarian, certified canine nutritionist, behaviorist or trainer.

### Weight

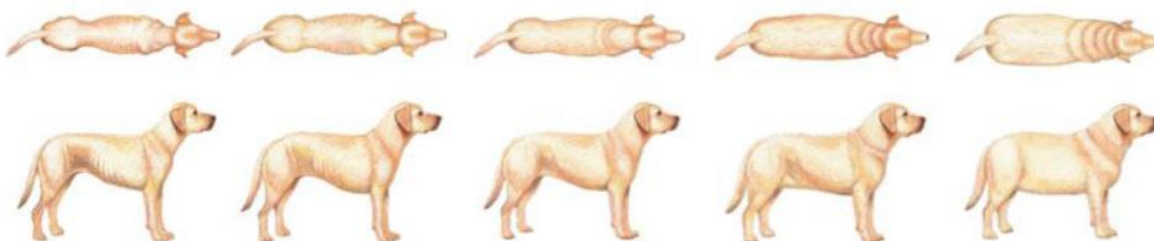
Did you know your dog is supposed to have a “waist?” Dog obesity is a huge problem (pun intended) in the United States. The consensus shows that about 60% of dogs are overweight or obese. However, many owners may not realize that their pet is overweight because we have all gotten accustomed to what an overweight dog looks like and assume that it is “normal” weight. Just as with many humans (who are, to no surprise, also overweight and obese along with their furry companions), a combination of too many calories, processed food, and too little exercise are the leading culprits.

What are the health risks of having an overweight or obese dog? Again, no surprise, they are the same diseases shared by humans who are also overweight/obese. Here are just a few of the many issues:

- Significantly reduced life expectancy
- Cardio and respiratory problems
- Diabetes
- Reduction in immunity and therefore at risk of infections and other illnesses
- Osteoarticular diseases, such as arthritis
- Increased risk for cancer, heart disease, hypertension, urinary bladder stones, and anesthetic complications

Here is a useful chart to determine if your pet is overweight, a healthy weight, or underweight:

1	3	5	7	9
<b>VERY THIN</b> <5% body fat	<b>UNDERWEIGHT</b> 5-15% body fat	<b>IDEAL BODY WEIGHT</b> 16-25% body fat	<b>OVERWEIGHT</b> 26-35% body fat	<b>OBESE</b> >35% body fat
Ribs easily felt with no fat cover	Bones raised with minimal tissue between the skin and bone	Ribs can be felt through slight fat cover	Difficult to feel ribs through moderate fat cover.	Ribs are difficult to feel under thick fat.



## **Caloric/Feeding Requirements**

One of the biggest issues owners face, regardless of what type or brand of food you feed your dog, is that many companies grossly exaggerate the amount of food your dog needs each day (they are trying to make more money, after all!). Nearly all (if not all) dog foods instruct you to base the portions on the weight of your dog using a weight range (i.e. 10-20lbs, 21-35lbs, etc.). Sometimes they may include your dog's activity level to tweak the amount a bit. But they are very general guidelines and are clearly contributing to the obesity issue with dogs. It is important to have a rough estimate of how many calories your dog needs each day (based on its weight and other factors) and then adjust your portions accordingly. **Treats should also account for no more than 10% of your dog's total daily calories.**

In addition, with so many brands and kinds of dog foods to choose from, it can be very confusing to know what is best for your dog. Your veterinarian, and your local independent pet food store owner are two good resources, as are certified canine nutritionists. However, doing your research on the company, the kind of food, where it is sourced and how it is manufactured are very important to help you determine the best diet for your dog. Here is a list of some useful resources:

- This is a link to a chart that can help you determine your dog's (and cat's) estimated energy requirements (calories) each day so you can feed your dog what he/she needs to be healthy:

[Hill's Pet Nutrition Estimated Energy Requirements](#)

- This website is a fantastic resource to learn more about pet obesity and prevention:

<https://www.petobesityprevention.org/>

- The Pet Nutrition Alliance, is an excellent source of nutritional information and has great resources written by veterinary nutritionists:

<https://petnutritionalliance.org/>

- WASVA – World Small Animal Veterinary Association has helpful feeding guidance basics.

[GNC Guidelines 120421](#) (Guidelines on Selecting Pet Foods)

[The-Savvy-Dog-Owner-s-Guide-to-Nutrition-on-the-Internet.pdf](#)

## **Exercise (& Safety)**

Just as with humans, dogs require daily exercise for several reasons:

### **Physical health:**

- Exercise helps with weight management, muscle development, agility, and flexibility. Fit dogs are less likely to suffer from arthritis and obesity. Exercise for dogs can come in several different forms: walking, hiking, running, playing fetch, agility classes, and supervised playdates with other dogs to name a few.
- If you choose to use a dog park as a place for your dog to get exercise and socialization, please do your research first on the dog park and any requirements they may have. There are lots of articles online about the “dos” and “don'ts” of dog parks that will help ensure you have a fun and safe experience with your pup.

- Safety during walks is very important. It is always best to use a harness or martingale-style collar on your dog, and a standard 4–6-foot leash, not a retractable leash. In addition, you should have a collar with identifying information on it separate from the collar or harness your leash is attached to. In the case that your dog gets out of his harness or collar and runs, he will still have his ID on his other collar. In addition, all dogs should be microchipped.
- It is dangerous to tie your dog to a tree, attach him to a cable staked to the ground, or a cable run mounted between trees. These methods can cause strangulation, broken necks and legs, and other injuries. And off-leash dogs always run the risk of running away, no matter how well trained you think they are.
- Be very diligent about how the weather can affect your dog. During walks, they should have a jacket in the winter (especially if they are short-haired). In the summer, all dogs can burn their paw pads on hot asphalt or sidewalks, as well as get overheated easily, so make sure they have plenty of fresh water to drink, especially on longer walks/hikes, and keep them in the shade or on grass when possible.
- Many dogs love car rides so much that you will have to spell the word “C-A-R” to other people, so your dog does not get too excited. Whether you are going 5 minutes down the road to your local park, or for a weekend get-a-way, **ALL DOGS SHOULD BE USING A SECURED SAFETY HARNESS, CARRIER or CRATE IN THE CAR.** Statistics show that only 16% of people traveling with their pets secure them in the car. There are lots of resources and websites for information on pet-safe car travel. For your safety and theirs, buckle up your pup! Check out this link: [How to Keep Your Pets Safe in a Car - Consumer Reports](#)

#### **Mental health:**

- Dogs need mental stimulation, just as much as they require physical exercise. Fit and active dogs are less likely to have behavior problems, including excessive licking, barking, chewing, digging, jumping and other anxiety-related behaviors. Mental stimulation also helps your dog build trust and confidence in you and in their environment and assists with socializing them with other people and dogs. So, while throwing a ball in your backyard may fulfill some of your dog’s physical needs, dogs need to go beyond their home territory and have a chance to sniff and explore other locations for their mental health. Puzzle toys, snuffle mats, agility, scent work, and other dog toys, games, and classes also provide physical and mental stimulation.

#### **Digestive health:**

- Regular exercise helps regulate the digestive tract and keep things moving!