

FEEDING FOR HEALTH

PFMA's seven steps for weight management

1) HELP OWNERS SELECT A PET FOOD APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR PET

The best way to ensure a healthy diet is to feed a complete pet food (or a combination of appropriate complementary pet foods), specially formulated for the type of pet and their life stage. After that, palatability, owner preference will influence food choices. Help guide owners through the pet food label and the PFMA factsheet on 'Understanding Pet Food Labels' is a great staff training tool to work from.

2) EMPHASISE TO OWNERS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FEEDING GUIDELINES ON THE PET FOOD PACKET

The guidelines show how much of the specific product is required per day. The recommendations are usually based on a pet's weight, and sometimes take in to account stage of life and activity levels. Remind owners that each pet is unique and guidelines provide a starting point, adjustments according to weight may need to be made.

3) WEIGH FOOD PORTIONS WITH KITCHEN SCALES

Owners should weigh out portions with kitchen scales until they know the right amount to feed using a measuring cup.

4) TREATS AND SNACKS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 10 PERCENT OF A PET'S CALORIE INTAKE

Which means at least 90 percent of a pet's calories should come from their main, complete pet food. Treating is a great way to bond but does need to be done responsibly.

5) PROMOTE AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE WITH LOTS OF WALK AND PLAYTIME

Environmental enrichment is important to ensure a pet doesn't get bored when they are confined. Safe toys and moveable objects will increase both physical and mental activity.

6) ADVISE OWNERS TO WEIGH PETS REGULARLY




In addition to regular weight checks, owners can also check their pet's body condition using Pet Size-O-Meters. This version of the Body Condition Score Chart used by vets is a good way for owners to assess whether a pet is overweight or underweight. Ideally, owners should be able to feel their pet's ribs with very light finger pressure.

A note to puppy owners: Like most health issues, preventing obesity is much easier than treating it. It is important for puppy owners to familiarise themselves with a healthy growth pattern and to start regular weight and body condition checks from an early stage. Puppy Growth Charts, available from vet practices are a good way to track growth.

7) IF A PET IS OVERWEIGHT, THERE MAY BE AN UNDERLYING HEALTH ISSUE, WHICH NEEDS TO BE CHECKED

If owners struggle to feel their pet's ribs, spine and hip bones with very light finger pressure, and they don't have a visible waist, then the dog or cat is likely to be overweight.

Cat Size-O-Meter

Size-O-Meter Score:	Characteristics:
1 Very Thin More than 20% below ideal body weight	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ribs, spine and hip bones are very easily seen in short-haired petsProminent waistObvious loss of muscle mass with no body fat
2 Thin Between 10-20% below ideal body weight	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ribs, spine and hip bones are easily seenObvious waistVery little body fat
3 Ideal	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ribs, spine and hip bones are easily feltVisible waistA small amount of body fat
4 Overweight 10-15% above ideal body weight	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ribs, spine and hip bones are hard to feelNo defined waistSlightly sagging belly
5 Obese More than 15% above ideal body weight	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ribs, spine and hip bones extremely difficult to feel under a padding of fatNo visible waistHeavy fat pads in lower back and an obvious sagging belly - skin rolls may snap from side to side when walking



This means they need less calories, which could be resolved by feeding less treats or main-meal food, or by feeding a 'light' diet. Owners should speak to their vet first to rule out any underlying health issues before adjusting the food. 🐾

USEFUL RESOURCES FOR STAFF TRAINING AND CUSTOMERS:

- PFMA Pet Size-O-Meters for cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs and birds
- PFMA Healthy Weight poster
- Online calorie calculator for cats and dogs – find out how much food to provide based on a pet's individual needs

AVAILABLE AT:

www.pfma.org.uk/factsheets-and-tools