



HOW TO HELP A CAT RETURN TO A HEALTHY WEIGHT

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THE ISSUE

About half of US cats are overweight. Overweight cats are more likely to develop diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, cancer, urinary tract disease and unhealthy skin and coat conditions. But 9 out of 10 owners whose cats are overweight don't know it.

So, what's the definition of overweight for a cat, and how do cat owners find out if their cat meets it? The definition is simple: cats that are a 4 or 5 on a five-point Body Condition Scale are overweight. Finding out your cat's Body Condition Score (BCS) is simple, ask your vet or a Mud Bay staffer. We'll help you score your cat (if you bring her in) or give you a Feline Body Condition Score Chart so you can score her yourself when you get home.

Why are so many of our cats overweight? There are three big causes: 1) they eat too much; 2) they eat the wrong thing (too many carbs, not enough moisture and protein); 3) they don't get enough exercise. If your cat is overweight, then returning her to a healthy weight just requires you to gradually address these three causes in a way that works for both you and your cat. We outline how to do this below, but please ask a Mud Bay staffer for help finding just the right approach for you and your cat.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

We recommend that cat owners discuss their plans for helping their cats return to a healthy weight with their veterinarians before making changes. This is especially important for cats that have veterinary conditions and for senior and geriatric cats.

Contact your cat's veterinarian immediately if: 1) your cat refuses to eat for more than 36 hours; 2) your cat appears to eat much less than he needs for several days in a row—extended fasting or inadequate caloric intake can result in hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease), a potentially life threatening condition; 3) the bones in the back of your cat's head or along his spine seem to become very prominent; 4) there are other significant changes in your cat's health, behavior, appetite or appearance (other than **very gradual** weight loss).

THE SOLUTION

Returning an overweight cat to a healthy weight should be a slow, gradual process—losing two pounds for a cat is equivalent to losing thirty or forty pounds for a person! Your cat should lose no more than 3% to 4% of its weight per month. Rapid changes in weight are unhealthy and can be dangerous. We've starred (*) the approaches we recommend trying first.

1 Measure and spread out

- ***Measure food** so you know exactly how much your cat is eating. If your cat is free-feeding and he's a 4 or 5 BCS now, then free feeding isn't working for him. He needs your help in regulating how much he eats. Start by figuring out how much he's eating now, and write it down. Continue writing down the amounts as you **slightly** (no more than 10-20% per month) reduce the amount you feed.
- ***Spread out among several small meals**—three per day or more if possible. Multiple meals throughout the day are more like your cat's natural feeding pattern. She'll feel less deprived as you cut back on her calories, and you may get to sleep through the night without being awakened by the meows of a hungry cat.

Mud Bay and its staff strive to help dog and cat owners improve the health of their animals and to increase the happiness owners experience in caring for their animals by providing natural foods, well-made supplies and useful information. Mud Bay and its staff do not diagnose or treat specific conditions, and the information provided by Mud Bay's staff, publications, website and other media are not substitutes for treatment by a veterinarian. A great vet is an invaluable resource, and we recommend that owners discuss diet and other changes in the care of their animals with theirs.

2 *Feed a diet that's more like mouse

Cats' natural diet is small prey (like mice). Small prey is around 70% moisture, and the remaining 30% is high in protein, high in fat and low in carbohydrates. This is radically different from the kibble diet most modern US cats eat: 10% moisture with moderate levels of protein, fat and carbs. Cats seem to have a much easier time maintaining a healthy weight when their diet is similar to their natural high moisture, high protein, low carb diet. Transitioning a long-time kibble eater to raw frozen, freeze-dried or wet foods is easy in some cases and more challenging in others, but there are lots of effective techniques for tricking stubborn felines into returning to their nutritional roots—and the payoff is likely to be a cat who lives a longer, healthier life. For more information, ask us for a free copy of our introduction, *Short Guide to Healthy Food for Cats*. For specific food recommendations and techniques for switching, please ask us for these solution sheets: *How to Feed Your Cat Frozen Raw Food*, *How to Feed Your Cat Freeze-dried & Dehydrated Food*, *How to Transition Cats to Raw Frozen, Freeze-dried & Dehydrated Food*; *How to Transition Cats to Wet Food*.

Even after using all of the switching techniques, there are a few cats that can't be convinced to transition to high moisture, high protein, low carb diets. If your cat is one of these, there are a few high protein, moderate to low fat, and low carb kibbles you can try. While most overweight cats seem to do best with a high moisture, high protein, low carb diet, there are a few cats who seem to benefit from a low calorie, high fiber weight loss approach.

3 Increase exercise

Physical activity burns calories and increases muscle mass. Cats are hardwired to hunt before they eat, and owners can tap into this instinctive routine to encourage physical activity.

- ***Interactive playtime.** Chasing a feather snake, a furry mouse, or a windup bug can give your cat the feeling of hunting for her meal. Ten minutes of hunting twice a day before she eats will make her happy, help the two of you bond and help her lose weight.
- **Feeding games** make feeding time fun and burn calories! Let her work for a treat by putting a treat in an interactive toy or hide her meals in different areas of the house (so that she has to hunt for it).

4 Promote Muscle Mass

There are no quick fixes or miracle weight loss pills for cats, but research indicates that L-carnitine (an amino acid) can help cats lose weight faster while gaining lean muscle mass. Some diets include supplemental L-carnitine. If your cat's diet doesn't, consider supplementing with treats that contain L-carnitine or another L-carnitine source.

OTHER INFORMATION

Before you begin a weight loss program, spend time feeling the back of your cat's head and backbone. Get a feeling for the thickness of the skin, fat and muscle in these areas. If these bones become highly prominent, call your vet—your cat may be losing muscle mass.

RESULTS

Slow weight loss—no more than 3%-4% of total body weight per month—is the goal. That's about 1 pound per month for a 20lb cat. Don't guess: weigh your cat every couple of weeks and track the results on paper. Once your cat reaches his healthy weight, help him maintain it by following the same approach: the right foods in measured amounts plus exercise.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

Mud Bay staffers are specifically trained to help cat owners return their cats to a healthy weight. Muddies can also help you find the products that match the recommendations on this sheet, so if you need more help or information, please let us know.

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