

ADDRESSING A CRITICAL CONVERSATION GAP

PET OBESITY IS A COMPLEX, SENSITIVE TOPIC THAT CAN BE CHALLENGING TO DISCUSS WITH CLIENTS. ONE KEY TO HAVING SUCCESSFUL OBESITY-RELATED CONVERSATIONS IS FINDING COMMON GROUND WITH CLIENTS: THE PET'S HEALTH.



Pet obesity is a disease of global significance. In select populations, the reported prevalence of veterinarian-diagnosed overweight and obese cats and dogs is up to 63% and up to 65%, respectively.^{1,2} As in people, the prevalence of pets with obesity is increasing.

Veterinary professionals typically recognize the overweight or obese pet, know the health consequences of obesity, and understand that managing excess weight is vital to pet health. However, many pet owners do not recognize obesity in their dogs and cats and/or may not be aware of the negative effects of excess weight on their pets' health.²⁻⁴ This disparity in viewpoints highlights a critical conversation gap.

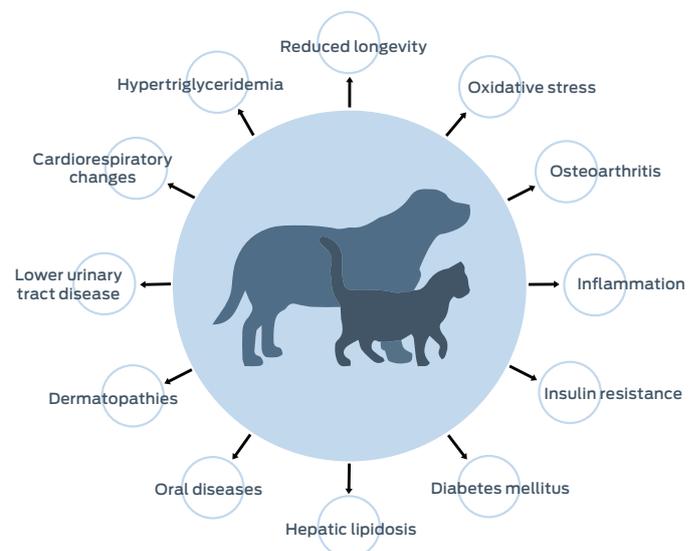
Conversation can provide opportunity for collaborative care

Obesity can be a complicated, sensitive subject that is uncomfortable for medical professionals—veterinary or human—to discuss. Sometimes, the discussions are influenced by unconscious bias, guilt, and judgment, all of which make honest conversations difficult but not impossible.⁵ As with any other serious disease, obesity is a disorder the veterinary team has a professional obligation to address.⁶

Pet obesity conversations may be easier for everyone involved if veterinary teams and pet owners shift how they think and talk about excess weight. Adipose tissue is an organ by definition and, with obesity now recognized as a disease, it should be discussed from the perspective of organ dysfunction.⁷ A body condition score (BCS) system is a widely accepted, practical way of assessing body fat in dogs and cats. Although a subjective, semi-quantitative method, BCS systems can be easily used in clinical practice to monitor pet body condition and to help the veterinary team talk about excess weight in nonjudgmental terms. BCS can be recorded in a patient's medical record, included in the problem list, and tracked over time. Pet owners also can be taught to assess their pet's body condition at home between veterinary visits.

THE COST OF PET OBESITY

Obesity is no longer considered an aesthetic or benign condition. Instead, it is considered a disease that produces significant health consequences¹⁻⁵ and may cause a substantial financial and/or emotional burden.⁶



Resources to help veterinary health care teams

Several resources are available for veterinary professionals who want to learn more about the science surrounding dog and cat obesity, pet nutrition, weight management plans, or client conversations on sensitive subjects.

“OBESITY IN PETS: Nutritional and Behavioral Strategies for Preventing and Managing Excess Weight” is a new monograph available from the Purina Institute. Content ranges from etiology, risk factors, and adverse effects of an overweight or obese body condition to prevention, weight loss strategies, and collaborating with pet owners to help pets with excess weight.

Calorie calculation is easier now that energy requirement calculators have been added to the tools available in CentreSquare™. The calculators use a pet’s age group, current weight, and BCS to provide the estimated daily calories for the pet to reach or maintain ideal body condition.

CentreSquare also offers a variety of nutrition conversation tips. Veterinary teams may find the videos on engaging clients regarding pet obesity and determining a client’s readiness to change particularly helpful.



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The Cost of Pet Obesity

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