

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.

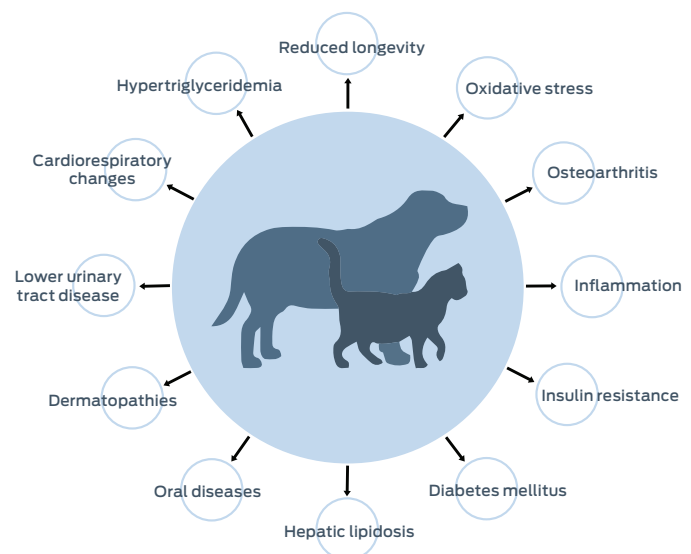
Conversation can provide opportunity for collaborative care

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.



Sign Up To Get The Latest Scientific Updates

You'll receive updates on discoveries in nutritional science, educational information, invitations to events, newsletters and much more from the Purina Institute.

[Sign Up Now](#)

References

Addressing a Critical Conversation Gap

1. German, A. J., Woods, G. R. T., Holden, S. L., Brennan, L., & Burke, C. (2018). Dangerous trends in pet obesity. *Veterinary Record*, 182(1), 25. doi: 10.1136/vr.k2
2. Larsen, J. A., & Villaverde, C. (2016). Scope of the problem and perception by owners and veterinarians. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 46(4), 761–772. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2016.04.001
3. Brooks, D., Churchill, J., Fein, K., Linder, D., Michel, K. E., Tudor, K., Ward, E., & Witzel, A. (2014). 2014 AAHA weight management guidelines for dogs and cats. *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*, 50(1), 1–11. doi: 10.5326/JAAHA-MS-6331
4. Freeman, L. M., Abood, S. K., Fascetti, A. J., Fleeman, L. M., Michel, K. E., Laflamme, D. P., Bauer, C., Kemp, B. L. E., Van Doren, J. R., & Willoughby, K. N. (2006). Disease prevalence among dogs and cats in the United States and Australia and proportions of dogs and cats that receive therapeutic diets or dietary supplements. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 229(4), 531–534. doi: 10.2460/javma.229.4.531
5. Pearl, R. L., Wadden, T. A., Bach, C., Leonard, S. M., & Michel, K. E. (2020). Who’s a good boy? Effects of dog and owner body weight on veterinarian perceptions and treatment recommendations. *International Journal of Obesity*, 44(12), 2455–2464. doi: 10.1038/s41366-020-0622-7
6. Churchill, J., & Ward, E. (2016). Communicating with pet owners about obesity: Roles of the veterinary health care team. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 46(5), 899–911. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2016.04.010
7. Farcas, A. K., & Michel, K. E. (2016). Confronting the problem of obesity in dogs and cats. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 46(5), xi–xii. doi: 10.1016/j.cvsm.2016.06.015

The Cost of Pet Obesity

1. Kealy, R. D., Lawler, D. F., Ballam, J. M., Mantz, S. L., Biery, D. N., Greeley, E. H., Lust, G., Segre, M., Smith, G. K., & Stowe, H. D. (2002). Effects of diet restriction on life span and age-related changes in dogs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 220(9), 1315–1320. doi: 10.2460/javma.2002.220.1315
2. Teng, K. T., McGreevy, P. D., Toribio, J. L., Raubenheimer, D., Kendall, K., & Dhand, N. K. (2018). Strong associations of nine-point body condition scoring with survival and lifespan in cats. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, 20(12), 1110–1118. doi: 10.1177/1098612X17752198
3. German, A. J., Ryan, V. H., German, A. C., Wood, I. S., & Trayhurn, P. (2010). Obesity, its associated disorders and the role of inflammatory adipokines in companion animals. *Veterinary Journal*, 185(1), 4–9. doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2010.04.004
4. Lund, E. M., Armstrong, P. J., Kirk, C. A., & Klaussner, J. S. (2005). Prevalence and risk factors for obesity in adult cats from private U.S. veterinary practices. *International Journal of Applied Research in Veterinary Medicine*, 3(2), 88–96.
5. Lund, E. M., Armstrong, P. J., Kirk, C. A., & Klaussner, J. S. (2006). Prevalence and risk factors for obesity in adult dogs from private U.S. veterinary practices. *International Journal of Applied Research in Veterinary Medicine*, 4(2), 177–186.
6. Bomberg, E., Birch, L., Endenburg, N., German, A. J., Neilson, J., Seligman, H., Takashima, G., & Day, M. J. (2017). The financial costs, behaviour and psychology of obesity: A One Health analysis. *Journal of Comparative Pathology*, 156(4), 310–325. doi: 10.1016/j.jcpa.2017.03.007