

Correct This Single Mistake, and Your Pet Will Likely Be Healthier and Happier

Triggers all top 10 health issues for dogs — and for cats. And just by correcting this single thing, you could greatly improve their quality of life, reduce pain, and save their life. It's simple and loving, and will also reap you big savings on vet bills.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Veterinary Pet Insurance (VPI), a pet health insurance provider, released their list of the top 10 dog and cat obesity-related conditions for 2013, which shows a more than 7% increase over 2012
- Arthritis in dogs and bladder/urinary tract disease in cats were the most common obesity-related conditions for which pet owners filed reimbursement claims in 2013
- Overweight and obese dogs can benefit from every pound lost (or every ounce, in the case of small breeds). An obese dog with arthritis can have noticeable improvement in mobility after losing just 6% to 9% of body weight
- In cats, dry food diets have been linked to both obesity and many of the conditions that fall under the general category of feline lower urinary tract disease
- Many cats are picky eaters. Others are addicted to a certain type of poor quality pet food, which is why it's important to transition your kitty from dry food to a more nutritious diet

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published May 30, 2015.

In 2013, Veterinary Pet Insurance Co. (VPI), a pet health insurance provider, published a list of the top 10 dog and cat obesity-related conditions, which accounted for over \$52 million in claims that year — a 7.3% increase from the previous year.

VPI covers over 525,000 pets, and the top 10 dog and cat obesity-related conditions for 2013 were:

- **Dogs**
 - Arthritis
 - Bladder/urinary tract disease
 - Hypothyroidism
 - Liver disease
 - Torn knee ligaments
 - Diabetes

- Disease disc in the spine
- Fatty growth
- Chronic kidney disease
- Heart failure
- **Cats**
 - Bladder/urinary tract disease
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Diabetes
 - Liver disease
 - Asthma
 - Arthritis
 - High blood pressure
 - Heart failure
 - Gall bladder disorder
 - Immobility of spine

Dog guardians filed over 39,000 claims for arthritis, which is the most common joint disease seen in overweight and obese dogs. The average claim was \$300.

Bladder or urinary tract disease topped the list of the most common feline condition associated with obesity. VPI received 4,700 claims for this disease from cat guardians, with an average claim amount of \$420.

Obese Dogs with Arthritis Benefit from Every Pound of Weight Lost

A study conducted at the University of Glasgow Veterinary School in Scotland evaluated the effect of weight loss on lameness in dogs.¹

It was an 18-week study of 14 family dogs including a Border Collie, a Bearded Collie, a Rottweiler, a Springer Spaniel, two Staffordshire Bull Terriers, two mixed breed dogs, and six Labrador Retrievers. The dogs were on average 24% heavier than their ideal body weight and suffered from varying degrees of hip dysplasia and arthritis.

The dogs' body weight and pelvic circumference were measured at the beginning of the study, along with severity of lameness. They were placed on a weight loss program using commercially available food. Owners were instructed not to change the dogs' level of exercise for the duration of the study.

The same person evaluated the dogs every 2 weeks for 12 weeks, then 4 weeks apart for the final 2 visits. Weight, pelvic circumference, and severity of lameness at a walk and a trot were measured at each visit.

By visit 3, body weights were significantly decreased from starting weights, and by visit 5, pelvic circumference was significantly reduced from starting measurements. By the final visit, the dogs had lost on average 8.85% of their initial body weight. The pelvic circumference of the dogs was reduced on average almost 7%.

From visit 2 onwards, lameness scores for both walking and trotting significantly improved week by week. At the end of the study, 82% of the dogs showed improvement in lameness.

The results demonstrate that when an overweight dog reaches about a 6% decrease in body weight, lameness is significantly decreased. Additional improvement is seen as additional weight is lost.

Bottom line: an obese dog with osteoarthritis can have noticeable improvement in lameness after losing just 6% to 9% of body weight.

Feeding Tips for an Overweight or Obese Dog

The dog food used in the University of Glasgow study was a “prescription” diet that isn’t recommended, just as highly processed non-prescription weight management or low fat commercial diets are never recommended for pets.

Your dog should be fed balanced, species-appropriate nutrition, not the carb and fiber filled processed stuff marketed as good for overweight dogs. Portion control is another key element in helping your pet lose weight.

Dry Cat Food Linked to Obesity and Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease

A study published in 2011 in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery² took a look at risk factors for urethral obstruction, clinical signs, outcomes, and recurrence rates in 82 cats. Urethral obstruction (UO) is a very common, life-threatening condition in cats and is one of several conditions that fall into the category of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD).

Notably, the cats with UO were significantly younger than a control group of healthy kitties, significantly heavier, and most (over 80%) were fed dry food only. Not one of the 82 cats with UO was fed an exclusively wet food diet.

Cats need moisture-rich diets because they don’t have a strong thirst drive compared to other species. They are designed to get almost all the water they need from the food they eat. Cats in the wild hunt prey, and prey consists of about 75% water. Canned cat food contains at least that much moisture. Dry food, on the other hand, contains only about one-tenth that amount.

The bodies of felines aren’t built to digest carbohydrates efficiently, and dry pet food is typically loaded with carbs. Cats lack the necessary enzymes to break down and digest carbs, or turn them into energy. The majority of carbs in a cat’s diet are therefore stored as fat. Given the ingredients in most dry cat food, it’s easy to see from a physiological standpoint how cats become overweight.

Moisture-Rich Diets Help Prevent/Resolve Obesity in Cats

Researchers at the University of California, Davis conducted a study to determine how the water content in food affects the amount cats eat and their body weight.³

The study involved 10 young, healthy, intact male cats, and results showed that consumption of canned food resulted in less food eaten, a decrease in body weight, and no change in body composition (lean body mass, fat body mass, and total body water).

The UC-Davis researchers concluded that canned (wet) diets result in cats voluntarily eating less and a corresponding reduction in body weight. Further, nutritional content and digestibility were not compromised, which is a big concern with low fat/weight loss dry cat food formulas. Also, the kitties "greatly preferred" the canned (wet) diets.

It’s important to transition any cat still eating kibble to a canned food diet, and then ideally to a balanced, species-appropriate raw diet.

Many cats are picky eaters. Others are addicted to a certain type of poor quality pet food. Remember, there is a right way and a wrong way to transition your kitty from dry food to a more nutritious diet.

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com January 12, 2015](#)

¹ [Veterinary Research Communications, 2010 Mar;34\(3\):241-53](#)

² [Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, 2011 Feb;13\(2\):101-8](#)

³ [American Journal of Veterinary Research, July 2011, Vol. 72, No. 7, Pages 918-923](#)
