

The Most Important Decision You Make Each Day – Your Pet's Life Depends on It

Many pet owners don't realize the power they hold when they make this daily decision. Whether or not your pet leads a long healthy life hinges on it. This is one of the most profound ways to help prevent or minimize arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, and kidney disease in your pet.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The latest Association for Pet Obesity Prevention survey shows that over half of America's cats and dogs continue to be overweight or obese
- Obesity continues to be the greatest health threat to pets. It kills millions prematurely, creates immense pain and suffering and costs tens of millions of dollars in avoidable veterinary expenses
- The survey also revealed stark differences between how pet owners and veterinarians define healthy pet food
- Many more pet parents than veterinarians see the value of grain-free and corn-free pet foods, raw diets and organic ingredients
- In addition to a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, practicing portion control and insuring your pet gets plenty of exercise are the keys to keeping her at a healthy weight

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 21, 2017.

The annual survey by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) reveals not only the sad news that U.S. **dogs and cats continue to grow fatter**, but also contains some jaw dropping information on the difference between pet owner and veterinary views on what constitutes a healthy pet diet.

Obesity Continues To Be the Greatest Health Threat to Pets

In 2016, 54% of U.S. dogs, or about 42 million were too heavy to be healthy. Overweight dogs = 34% of the total; obese dogs made up the remaining 20%. The news is even worse for U.S. cats, with 28% overweight and 31% obese, for a total of 59% or 51 million kitties.

Overweight and obesity in pets is both a primary disease and the root cause of many other diseases that develop as the result of too much weight, including:

- Arthritis
- Diabetes
- Hypertension

- Hypothyroidism
- Kidney disease

And you can add to this list a significant reduction in the quantity and quality of your overweight pet's life.

While some pet parents aren't even aware their dog or cat is overweight, others know but aren't concerned or don't seem to realize they're compromising the animal's health.

More pet owners should understand the consequences of letting their dog or cat get fat. It's hard to believe most pet parents would continue to overfeed, feed the wrong foods and under-exercise their companion animals if they realized they were destroying their pet's health.

"Obesity continues to be the greatest health threat to dogs and cats," states APOP Founder, veterinarian Dr. Ernie Ward.

"Obesity is a disease that kills millions of pets prematurely, creates immeasurable pain and suffering, and costs pet owners tens of millions of dollars in avoidable medical costs."¹

Pet Parents and Vets Are Sharply Divided on the Best Diet for Dogs and Cats

Ward asserts, "The most important decision a pet owner makes each day is what they choose to feed. Choose wisely. Your pet's life depends on it."² He believes the war against creating overweight dogs and cats is one that pet parents and veterinarians should win.

Obesity is an entirely preventable medical condition, and it's the responsibility of pet owners — with support from their veterinarian — to maintain their dog or cat at a healthy weight through species-appropriate nutrition and physical activity.

Unfortunately, the APOP 2016 survey results indicate veterinarians aren't at all supportive of people who want to feed their pets something other than processed pet food. In fact, pet owners and veterinary professionals are "sharply divided" on pet food ingredients and types of dog and cat diets:

- 61% of pet parents think low- or no-grain diets are healthier for dogs versus 25% of veterinary professionals
- 35% of pet parents think raw diets are healthier for dogs and cats versus 15% of veterinary professionals
- 43% of pet parents think organic pet foods are healthier versus 23% of veterinary professionals
- 27% of pet parents think corn is healthy for dogs versus 48% of veterinary professionals

Pet owners and veterinarians also disagree on how much attention vets pay to a dog's or cat's weight. Over 93% of pet parents claim to have visited a veterinarian in the past year, but only 49% recall the vet discussing their pet's weight. However, over 60% of vets claim they had the discussion.

Interestingly, less than 4% of pet parents stated they felt guilty or uncomfortable when their vet talked about their pet's weight with them. And while 64% of veterinarians believe in recommending (processed) "maintenance diets," only 42% of pet parents were open to the idea.

Finally, when it comes to finding the best sources of dietary recommendations for their dog or cat, over 46% of pet parents prefer to rely on information they find online, whereas only 19% of veterinary professionals feel the same.

This Is Why Most Veterinarians Aren't Good Animal Nutrition Resources

It would seem there are a number of destructive forces at work that help to create and maintain fat dogs and cats. We have owners who either don't realize their pet is too heavy or aren't concerned enough to do something about it.

We have around half the veterinarians in the country not even raising the subject with owners of overweight animals. And we have the vast majority of vets sticking stubbornly to their misguided, uninformed advice to feed processed diets.

If you're frustrated by your own veterinarian's lack of guidance, or poor guidance when it comes to your pet's diet, you should know that most veterinary schools gloss over the entire subject of nutrition.

They leave it up to a handful of major pet food companies to conduct seminars for vet students that are heavily slanted toward the products they sell.

Sadly, after graduation, too few veterinarians attempt to fill in the significant gaps in their animal nutrition education, and those who do often decide to become board-certified veterinary nutritionists, which for most means winding up with financial ties to major pet food manufacturers.

Board-certified veterinary nutritionists are DVMs who complete additional training and receive a diploma from the American College of Veterinary Nutrition (ACVN).

Once certified, veterinary nutritionists work in veterinary schools, government agencies, pet drug companies, private animal hospitals, for themselves and very often, for pet food companies. Major pet food manufacturers also frequently pay the tuition for DVMs studying to become veterinary nutritionists.

So when a veterinary nutritionist recommends X or Y or Z pet food — or discourages the feeding of raw or homemade diets — chances are that he or she is obligated in some way to a pet food manufacturer. This association creates an obvious conflict of interest when it comes to the advice and recommendations they offer.

The Best Food for Dogs and Cats at Any Weight

If your pet needs to lose a few pounds, or even if he doesn't, the best food you can offer to slim him down or keep him at a healthy weight is a nutritionally balanced homemade diet, either raw or cooked. If you're not in a position to fix your pet's meals at home, feed a commercially available balanced raw food diet. If your pet requires a veterinary diet, opt for a **fresh "prescription diet."**

Skip all the commercial weight control, "maintenance" and low fat diets. Regardless of his weight, your dog or cat still needs the right nutrition for his species, which means food that is high in animal protein and moisture, with low or no grain content.

It's also very important to practice portion control – usually a morning and evening meal, carefully measured. A high protein, low carb diet with the right amount of calories for weight loss, controlled through the portions you feed, is what will take the weight off your dog or cat. And don't forget to factor in any calories from treats.

You'll also need to regularly exercise your pet. An overweight body gets back in shape by taking in fewer calories and expending more energy. Daily exercise, including at least 20 minutes of consistent aerobic activity, will help your pet burn fat, increase muscle tone and help prevent boredom and destructive behaviors.

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com March 1, 2017](#)

¹ [Association for Pet Obesity Prevention \(Archived\)](#)

² [PR Newswire, March 13, 2013](#)
