




“Do I Look Fat in This?”


Is Fido Overweight?


Dogs like humans can become overweight and suffer many similar negative side effects - joint problems, degenerative arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, to name a few. These weight-related problems affect adult dogs, but excess weight on adolescent, growing dogs also can be harmful, impacting developing joints, ligaments, and bones.

None of us want our dogs overweight or unhealthy, but how can we tell when Fido should shed a few pounds? Below are some reasons why Fido may be chubby, a few tips on determining the correct weight for your dog, and what you can do to help your dog obtain and keep that svelte figure.

Why Fido May be Chubby:

 *We continue to feed the adult dog the same amount of food we fed him when he was an adolescent.* As a dog matures his metabolism slows down. An adult dog needs less food than the growing pup to maintain his weight.

 *We believe what the food bag says.* Example: If the bag recommends 3 cups of food for a 25 pound dog, that's what we feed. Seldom however does even the most active dog need as much food as is recommended. *(On a slightly cynical note: dog food producers are in business to sell dog food, not worry if our dogs are overweight.)*


 *The dog is less active.* Example: A dog that was active in the summer is less active in the winter, yet we continue to feed the same amount of food.




What *Should* My Dog Weigh?


Dogs vary in height and bone structure, so there's no one ideal weight for a dog of any given breed or size. Don't worry about so much about what the number on the scales says, but take heed of how your dog feels when you touch him.

Dr. Chris Zink, D.V.M., Ph.D. provides these 3 simple tests to determine if your dog is at a good weight:

 Check your dog's neck. Press your thumb and index finger deep into the side of the neck just ahead of the shoulder, and pinch them together. If your fingers are more than 1/2"


apart, the dog is overweight. (Note: this is where old dogs tend to carry most of their excess fat, and they may actually be thin in other locations.)


 Check your dog's ribs. Stand with your dog beside you, facing his butt. Place your thumb on the middle of his spine half way down the back and spread your fingers out over his last few ribs. Then run your fingers up and down along his skin. You should be able to feel the bumps of his ribs without pressing in.


 Check your dog's hips. To check the hips, run your hand over your dog's hips. You should be able to feel the bumps of his two pelvic bones without pressing down.

And here's another way to determine how your dog's ribs should feel:

Hold your arm out parallel to the ground with your hand in a fist and held level with your arm, then -

 Feel the back of your fist. You'll notice you can barely feel the bones underneath. If your dog's ribs feel like this, he could lose some weight (see example 1 below).

 Now move your finger over the knuckles of your fist. You'll feel each knuckle protruding pronouncedly with little flesh covering them. If your dog's ribs feel like this, he's underweight (see example 2 below).

 Now feel the top of the fingers. You'll feel the bones of your fingers slightly padded by the flesh of each finger. If your dog's ribs feel like this, he's a good weight (see example 3 below).



example 1- chubby



example 2- too thin



example 3 - just right!

It's Time for a Change



To have your dog lose weight is as simple as cutting back his food. Just like humans, if too many calories make him fat, fewer calories will make him lean.

It will take constant evaluation of your dog's weight during his lifetime to determine whether the amount you feed your dog needs to be cut back, stay the same, or be increased.

Adjust the amount you feed to the amount of physical activity your dog is getting. A couch potato won't need to eat as much as a 2-mile-a-day jogger. And don't forget to figure in those doggie treats your dog may be getting!

For those who free feed their dogs (the food is left down all day for the dog), you'll need to begin to regulate the amount you feed and how you feed your dog. Measure the food you place in your dog's bowl and place the bowl down for the dog to eat, leaving the bowl down for 10 to 15 minutes. After that time, pick the bowl up and put it away. Your dog will soon learn to take advantage of this time to eat. Adjust the amount of the food as needed to help your dog maintain an ideal weight.

Whether you feed your dog once or twice a day depends on your personal preference and schedule.

But What About Nutrition?

People worry that their dogs will not get enough nutrition if they feed them less, but premium* dog foods are packed with nutrients.

**Note: Whether or not a dog food is "premium" and the best food for your dog is another subject outside the scope of this article. Just be aware you get what you pay for.*

Unless he has a hormonal problem (e.g. hypothyroidism), if your dog is overweight he is getting too much nutrition and cutting back will not put him in jeopardy.

Remember: just like humans, individual dogs vary in their metabolic rate and some dogs just need less food than others.

But He's Starving!

Some dogs seem to really miss that extra chow, giving their owners the sad-eyed look that says, "I hungry". To help fill these dogs' bellies yet help them lose weight, replace part of their dog food with pumpkin (canned, unsweetened, plain pumpkin) or frozen green beans thawed.

Begin by cutting the dog food back by 1/5 and replacing that amount with an equal amount of pumpkin or green beans. If you need to reduce your dog's dog food further, wait a week for his system to adjust to the change, then reduce the dog food another 1/5 replacing it with pumpkin or green beans.



Dogs love pumpkin. It has the texture of canned dog food, and green beans are usually a favorite too. Both provide vitamins and roughage, and make the dogs feel full.

Multiple Dog Households

If you're crazy like us and have more than one dog, you'll need to keep an eye on the dogs as they eat. Be aware that one dog might bully the other from their bowl and eat that dog's food as well as their own. The bully will end up eating more than he needs while your other dog ends up with less.

If this is the case, you might need to feed the dogs in separate rooms so the bully doesn't have a chance to confiscate the other's food bowl and the other dog can eat his meal in peace.

You'll Have A Healthier Dog

Keeping your dog lean is not just for cosmetics - a leaner puppy will have less chance to develop structural problems as they grow; a leaner adult dog will generally be healthier and fit; and the leaner older dog will have less problems with arthritis and other age-related conditions.

Now, if someone would just pick up my food bowl!

Our thanks to Dr. Chris Zink D.V.M., Ph.D. and Suzanne Clothier for some of the above information.

Additional information and original artwork by Deb Mickey