

Newsletter of the COMMUNITY PRACTICE SERVICE

College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University
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Spring 2008

How to help overweight and obese pets

Obesity is the single greatest cause of medical problems in companion animals. Two large studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom determined that about a quarter of dogs seen at small animal veterinary practices were overweight to grossly obese. Other studies relating to cats suggest that as many as 40 percent of house cats are overweight.

Obesity carries serious health risks such as arthritis, heart disease, and diabetes. Respiratory and birthing difficulties become more common, as well as other conditions such as hip and elbow dysplasia, pancreatitis and bladder tumors in dogs, and a fatty liver disease called hepatic lipidosis in cats. There is also a higher risk with anesthesia in obese pets, and a lower immune resistance to infectious diseases.

There are few overweight animals under the age of two, but as pets reach six to eight years of age, many begin to carry extra weight. Being overweight is preventable, but there are certain factors that increase

a pet's chance of becoming hefty, such as gender, age, physical activity, caloric intake of food, and even breed. It appears that Labrador retrievers, cocker spaniels, beagles, basset hounds, Shetland sheepdogs, pugs, golden retrievers, and dachshunds are among some of the more popular dog breeds that carry a higher propensity for being overweight. For cats, mixed breeds seem more prone to obesity than pure breeds. An exception to this is Persians.

Hormonal conditions are another factor that can contribute to obesity. Pets that experience a decrease in activity or have infrequent opportunities to exercise are also likely to gain weight. This can also happen if a pet suddenly becomes exclusively indoors, or if they must spend time recovering from surgery or an illness.



Stella

Is my pet overweight?

Each pet is unique, but in general, the way to assess ideal body condition for any pet is when you can feel its ribs easily, but do not see them, and when viewed from the side, the belly should appear tucked up. When viewing a pet from above, there should also be a noticeable waist in front of the hips.

If you feel your pet needs to lose weight, first start by having your veterinarian perform a thorough physical exam on your pet, which might include a blood chemistry test, blood cell analysis, urinalysis, and thyroid panel. Since a number of conditions may play a role in obesity, it is important to detect any underlying health problems that may need to be treated before initiating an appropriate weight loss program. This program may include a diet change, activity change, and in some cases, drug therapy.

Another good idea is to keep a food diary of what your pet is eating for a week or two. This should include all the food your pet consumes, who is giving the food, and what type of food, such as if it was people food, pet food, or treats. This not only accurately tells you what your pet is eating, but also gives ideas for where changes can be made. For pets that feed free choice, owners can measure how much food is put out each day and then measure how much is left at the end of the day to get an accurate amount.

If your veterinarian determines your pet is ready for a weight loss program, he or she can devise a program that best fits your pet's needs. Important features of a weight loss plan include setting a goal for the amount of weight to be lost, setting an amount for daily caloric intake, selecting a specific amount of exercise, monitoring the

Matthew Mickas, DVM
Raelynn Farnsworth, DVM
Nickol Finch, DVM
Helen Chapman, DVM
Tami Montgomery, RVT
Melody Gerber, RVT
Teresa Crawford Carson, LVT

To make an appointment call:
509-335-0711



Fourth-year veterinary student
Alyssa Peterson and Oliver.

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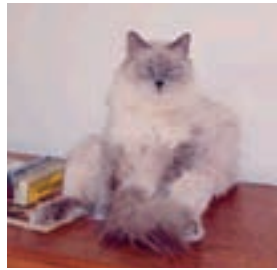
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progress of weight loss, adjusting calories, food, and exercise as needed, and finally, stabilizing the pet's caloric intake at its reduced weight to ensure that the weight is not regained.

As for a diet, there are many over-the-counter brands of pet foods that offer "light" versions, as well as specific therapeutic diets that have been developed for weight reduction. Before limiting what your pet eats, consult with your veterinarian to make sure your pet will be getting all the essential nutrients it needs. This is especially true for cats, which present unique problems when considering weight loss. In the past few years, feline dietary recommendations have changed dramatically. For a cat that needs a restricted calorie diet, there are several alternative diets that may suit your particular cat better than others. We would be happy to discuss these alternatives with you.

If treats are an important part of your relationship with your pet, there are low calorie treat options, such as therapeutic weight loss biscuits, canned green beans, carrots, celery sticks, rice cakes, squash, broccoli, or a portion of the pet's own weight loss diet designated to be given as treats. Remember to avoid



Baby

grapes or raisins, as they can be toxic. Try to keep treat calories to 10 percent of their total daily calories.

If exercise is also part of the plan, break your pet in gradually. Just two brisk 20-minute walks per day can benefit dogs fed reduction diets. Not only does walking help keep dogs healthy, but their owners benefit, too! In fact, several human studies have shown the benefits of owning a dog for human health. If you like, you can make improved health a goal for you and your pet.

Other activities such as swimming, playing fetch, chasing pets around the house, and using activity-related toys and obstacle courses are other good ways to get your pet moving. Exercise can be a fun way to enjoy your pet and strengthen your special bond.

Achieving weight loss in pets takes time and commitment. Realistically, it can take eight to twelve months for obese animals to lose their excess weight. If an animal does not respond to traditional methods of calorie restriction and an increase in exercise, medical therapy may help some animals. In the spring of 2007, a new FDA-approved product was released to manage obesity in dogs. If you have any questions about this or other weight-related issues, please contact us at 509-335-0711 or make an appointment for your pet.

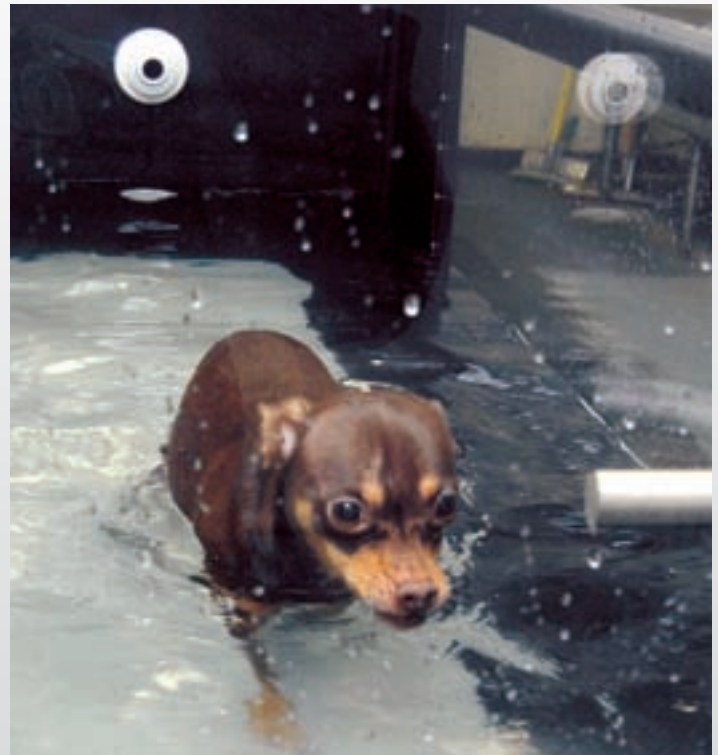
WSU's new underwater treadmill helps dogs with physical therapy and weight loss

Recently, WSU's College of Veterinary Medicine added a physical therapy program to the many services offered at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Designed specifically to help dogs and other small animals, the service specializes in helping post-surgical patients, such as orthopedic patients recovering from fractures and neurological patients recovering from spinal surgery. The service also helps non-surgical patients in need of physical therapy exercises, including arthritic and overweight dogs.

A new feature of the service includes an underwater treadmill that was installed in December 2007, through funds donated entirely from several grateful donors. The underwater treadmill is a gentle way for animals to exercise because the warm water used provides buoyancy to help animals walk in a normal gait position, and provides water resistance to increase muscle tone and balance.

Post-surgical patients can expect the recovery time to be shorter and less painful with physical therapy. Another advantage to physical therapy is that many patients can return to their normal activity after surgery. A patient that has had surgery for a cranial cruciate ligament repair can expect a full recovery with physical therapy that includes the underwater treadmill. The underwater treadmill activity can begin as early as 3-14 days after surgery.

"The underwater treadmill is an easy and more comfortable way for overweight dogs that suffer from arthritis or joint pain to get exercise while helping with weight reduction," said Lori Lutskas, a WSU certified canine rehabilitation practitioner and



Buddy Oliver, a two-year-old Chihuahua mix, undergoing therapy for a pelvic fracture in WSU's underwater treadmill

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neurology veterinary technician. She is in charge of the physical therapy program. "It is useful for conditioning high performance hunting dogs and other athletic dogs to keep them in good physical condition. We also use it for orthopedic patients recovering from fractures and neurology patients recovering from back and neck surgery."

Many patients that come to the WSU physical therapy service are referred from several primary services in the college, including the orthopedic, neurology, and Community Practice services. Referrals are also welcome from private practitioners. Lutskas works under the direct supervision of the primary veterinarians involved in her cases, and is aided by fourth-year veterinary students that rotate through the neurology and orthopedic services.

"Patients of the Community Practice Service that need conditioning undergo an initial evaluation by Dr. Farnsworth or Dr. Mickas, and are then sent to physical therapy," Lutskas said. "Patients that live in the area can come in to use the treadmill

two or three times a week with scheduled appointments. Each session lasts 30 minutes. To begin, the dog walks into the tank and the water surrounds its feet. Then the treadmill starts, and the dog begins to exercise. After the session is done, we towel dry the dog and it gets to go home. The majority of the animals seem to like it, and the exercise tends to make them feel a lot better."

A single treatment on the treadmill costs \$65, and a five-visit pre-paid package costs \$250. In addition to in-house physical therapy at the veterinary teaching hospital, Lutskas also develops home-care programs for clients. A future goal for the physical therapy program is to obtain a therapeutic ultrasound machine to help animals with damaged tissues and musculoskeletal injuries.

The WSU physical therapy service is open Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information about the underwater treadmill, the physical therapy service, or to schedule an appointment, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711. To make a donation to the physical therapy program, contact Andrea Farmer, assistant director of veterinary development, at 509-335-9515.

Raptors enjoy more rehabilitation room at WSU

Each year, the WSU Exotic and Wildlife Service at WSU's Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Pullman treats and rehabilitates approximately 400 wild birds and raptors, including owls, hawks, and eagles.

Once birds are recovered enough in the exotic animal ward to relearn how to fly or build muscle strength, they are taken to a special pen designed to help them reacclimate to the outdoors before they are released back into the wild. For years, this place was an old turkey house converted for wild birds. It is located south of the veterinary teaching hospital.

"The old building had three mews similar to small houses, and two flights with wire and netting in the natural environment designed to get birds used to outdoor weather, and gives them more space to fly," said Dr. Nickol Finch, a WSU clinical instructor who specializes in zoological animal medicine and helps run the Exotic Animal Service at the college.

Recently, due to collected donations from the public, a new outdoor raptor rehabilitation facility was built that includes 12 mews and five flights. Potlatch Corporation donated more than \$25,000 for the project last year.

"We have room for more animals now than we ever did before," Dr. Finch said. "Previously, 12 to 15 birds could fit in the old facility at one time. With the new building, we can fit about 50 birds of the same type.

"One of the flights is 20 feet tall and 100 feet long, which is big enough for eagles to fly about, get exercise, and build muscle," she said. "The building also provides room for our teaching birds to get outside, so they don't spend all their time inside the

hospital. It also gives injured birds a larger space to heal and get ready to go back to the wild."

Even with the added space, a second phase of building is being planned with donations as they come in. The additions will include six more mews and two more flights, as well as a treatment room, kitchen, amphitheater, and possibly a gift shop for the public.

"The first phase cost about \$120,000 and took about two years to raise," Dr. Finch said. "We need about as much to complete Phase Two. For the first phase, the WSU raptor club raised money at craft fairs and silent auctions. In addition to private donors, the Potlatch Corporation and Kinsmen Foundation were among our donors."

The WSU Teaching Hospital treats thousands of injured wildlife each year, including wild birds, reptiles, and mammals such as rabbits, mice, raccoons, and squirrels. The veterinary hospital relies heavily on donations for support of these animals.

There is a donation program designed exclusively for raptors called "Adopt a Raptor," in which donors give funds to provide food, shelter, and medical care for an owl, eagle, or hawk for one year. In addition to wildlife, the WSU Exotic and Wildlife Service treats pet birds, ferrets, rabbits, snakes, fish, and other

non-traditional pet species.

For more information about the raptor rehabilitation building or the Exotic and Wildlife Service, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711. To donate to the service, a raptor, or the raptor building, contact Andrea Farmer, assistant director of veterinary development, at 509-335-5389.



Dr. Nickol Finch holding an injured adult bald eagle brought in for treatment at WSU.

Lilies pose a deadly threat to cats

Lilies are very popular during the Easter season and are common in many floral arrangements throughout the year. Unfortunately for feline pet owners, these lovely plants are extremely toxic to cats that ingest them.

"Lily poisoning is not uncommon, and there are a significant number of pet owners that don't realize the danger lilies pose to their cats, especially indoor cats," said Dr. Patricia Talcott, a WSU associate professor who provides diagnostic toxicology services for the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman. "Many household cats like to nibble on plants, but even a small amount eaten from any part of a lily plant can cause a cat to experience acute, irreversible kidney failure."

There are several species of lilies (genera *Lilium* and *Hemerocallis*) that cause this problem, including the Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*), Tiger lily (*Lilium tigrinum*), Rubrum lily (*Lilium spp*), Asian lily (*Lilium asiatica*), Stargazer lily (*Lilium orientalis*), Day lily (*Hemerocallis dumortirei*), and the Glory lily (*Gloriosa superba*).

"To keep cats safe, I would be leery of having any plant in the house that belongs to the genus *Lilium* or *Hemerocallis*," Dr. Talcott said. Knowing the scientific name can be important when buying plants or bringing them home because not all plants with "lily" in their common name actually belong to the *Lilium* genus, such as the calla lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopia*) or peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*). These plants may cause irritation to animals that eat them, but they are not considered deadly.

"The property that makes lilies toxic to cats is unknown, but most poisoning cases involve indoor cats," Dr. Talcott said. "The risk of a cat going outside and chewing on a lily plant is relatively low, so cat owners with lilies in their garden probably don't have as much to worry about as a person that has a birthday bouquet on the table with lilies in it."

Cats are the only animals known to experience renal failure following ingestion of lilies, but dogs may have some mild gastrointestinal upset if they eat them. Because only a small amount of ingested lily will make a cat ill—in some cases as little as one bite of a leaf or

flower—it's hard for pet owners to know if their cat actually ate a lily unless caught in the act or evidence is seen on the plant. If a cat does devour a bit of lily, it may display signs within a few hours, which include vomiting, depression, and a loss of appetite.

"The vomiting is actually not associated with renal disease at this time," Dr. Talcott said. "But as the hours go by, non-specific signs of renal failure occur, such as depression, abdominal tenderness and pain, lethargy, and diarrhea. These non-specific signs can continue a day or two with the cat not doing well or feeling well, and then it will suddenly become critically ill."

Untreated cats suffering from acute renal failure typically die within one week. Even with treatment, the long term prognosis of a cat with renal disease is often poor.

"If it is a mild case in which a cat receives treatment within several hours or before the kidneys are severely affected, many cats will recover," Dr. Talcott said. "But the disease can be hard to detect in the early stages because the signs are so non-specific. Some cats may not display any signs at all until they are very sick. And like any cat with chronic renal disease, which is usually progressive and terminal, treatment for cats with acute renal failure is expensive, aggressive, and time consuming. Many people can't afford to do it financially or physically. Unfortunately, a lot of animals with renal disease are euthanized."

A veterinarian can often diagnose acute renal failure with some blood and urine tests, and ultrasound examination or kidney biopsy may be necessary. Initial treatment usually involves intravenous fluid therapy and hospitalization for several days, followed by long term medical care for chronic renal insufficiency.

"The key to this problem is prevention," Dr. Talcott said. "It is best that if you have cats that you don't allow them near lilies."

For more information or if you suspect lily poisoning in your cat, contact the WSU Community Practice immediately at 509-335-0711.



Spring Pet Tips

Abandoned wildlife—Sometimes people come upon seemingly abandoned young wildlife, such as chicks, bunnies, squirrel pups, and raccoon cubs. Many times, these animals are not abandoned and are much better off if left alone. Most animals do not spend every waking minute with their young. Doing so would soon attract predators and cause malnutrition for the mother. For instance, doe rabbits spend only about one hour with their kits in a day, and mostly after dark. Contrary to popular belief, most animals will not abandon their young just because of human scent. It is also not a good idea to try and feed or give water to baby animals. Many times, the animal will drown or be fed the wrong food. If you find a young animal and are not sure if it is abandoned or if it has an injury, please call the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711. Our specially trained staff in the Exotics and Wildlife Service will help you determine if the animal is truly an orphan and if it needs to be brought to the hospital.

Fleas and Ticks—Springtime brings the arrival of plants, flowers, and, among other things, insects and ticks. Although the Palouse does not have a flea problem, around March, it is a good idea to protect pets from ticks, especially if they visit grassy, bushy, or timbered areas. A number of preventative treatments are available. Contact the Community Practice at 509-335-0711 with any questions about which treatments are most suitable for your pet.

Allergies—Springtime is the start of allergy season for both humans and pets. Clinical signs of allergies in pets include chewing, licking, head shaking, and scratching. If your pet is experiencing these signs, call us for an appointment.

Holiday Plants and Food—Easter bunnies may look attractive to dogs and cats, including chocolate ones. Before allowing a pet to indulge, remember that chocolate can be dangerous for dogs and cats. Chocolate contains a substance called theobromine, a caffeine derivative, which can, in large doses, cause



Rags

seizures and potentially kill a dog or cat. Most pets don't need the extra calories found in chocolate. Be sure to store chocolate safely away from pets. Alcohol is also toxic for pets and should never be given to them. Certain springtime flowers and plants, including Easter lilies, can be toxic to pets as well. Check with

us for a list of these plants and what to do in case of poisoning. If you suspect poisoning, contact the WSU Community Practice immediately. If you buy treats for your family during the holidays, it may be a good idea to remember your pets too and provide a special chew toy or treats to help keep them out of plants and food and stay busy during activities such as Easter egg hunts.

Diseases and vaccines—Water-soaked soil and standing water are reservoirs for leptospirosis, a serious disease in dogs and people. Be sure to ask if your dog is at risk and vaccinated against the disease. Salmon

poisoning is another serious and potentially fatal disease for dogs that pet owners should be aware of. It can be acquired when dogs eat raw salmon, steelhead, or trout, even if previously frozen. These fish can be infected with an organism that causes the disease. Freezing wild salmon, steelhead, and trout does not destroy the causative organism. Clinical signs include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, swollen lymph nodes, bleeding from the nose, and eventually death. Although there is no vaccine for salmon poisoning, it can be treated successfully if caught in time.

Placing unwanted pets—When people pack up and move for the summer, sometimes pets get left behind to fend for themselves. Local shelters fill and there is generally an increase in the number of animals hit by cars or small animals left behind that are hurt by larger animals. The WSU Community Practice encourages responsible pet ownership in which pets are not left behind. For help placing an unwanted pet, contact the Whitman County Humane Society at 509-332-3422 or the Humane Society of the Palouse at 208-883-1166.

Want to know more about the Community Practice and small animal specialty services, or receive our quarterly newsletter online?

Visit the WSU Veterinary College Web site at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vth/smallAnimalServices.aspx, or subscribe to the online newsletter at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vth/newsletters/online.asp.

Also feel free to call 509-335-0711 for **veterinary appointments** or **emergency care**.

WSU Community Practice Team adds two new faces

When you come to WSU's Community Practice Service, you can be sure that your pet is receiving the best possible care. The veterinarians of the WSU Community Practice Service offer a full range of services for small animals without referral at WSU's Veterinary Teaching Hospital. These services include basic care, vaccinations, dental exams, geriatric checkups, more advanced diagnostics, and emergency care for sick animals.

We work together as a team to provide efficient and comprehensive care for all of our patients. The Community Practice Service operates like a regular veterinary practice, but with the added benefit of access to veterinary specialists in virtually every area of small animal medicine and surgery, as well as the best-equipped veterinary hospital in the Northwest with 24-hour emergency and ICU care.

We are pleased to announce two new members of the WSU Community Practice Service. **Licensed veterinary technician Teresa Crawford Carson** joined our crew at the end of November after spending six months helping treat animals in the anesthesia service. Originally from Olympia, Carson graduated as an LVT from Yakima Valley Community College and moved to Pullman last year with her husband, three dogs, a cat, and five fish.

"I love my job," she said. "I am still doing some anesthesia work, and help with blood draws, other diagnostic testing, and surgeries, including spays and neuters. I also help with dental procedures and work with the fourth year veterinary students."

In January, **Dr. Helen Chapman** joined our team as a clinical instructor. Originally from Australia, Dr. Chapman earned her veterinary degree from the University of Queensland in 2001. She worked in veterinary practices in New Zealand and England



Left to right: veterinary technician Tami Montgomery, Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth, Dr. Matt Mickas, veterinary technicians Melody Gerber and Teresa Crawford Carson, and Dr. Helen Chapman.

before coming to the United States, including the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Massey University in New Zealand. Dr. Chapman made the trip to the United States with her husband, Dr. Geoff Orbell, a pathologist for the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory located in the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine.

"I am interested in all aspects of general practice and am enjoying being a part of the Community Practice Service at WSU," Dr. Chapman said. "The interactions with clients, their pets, other clinicians in the VTH, and the students make my job very stimulating and enjoyable."

Welcome Dr. Chapman and Theresa if you see them in the lobby!

Grieving? You don't have to be alone

Have you lost a beloved animal companion? Perhaps you know someone who has. Please know the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine has a Pet Loss Hotline for those who would like to reach out for a caring listener. Know also that WSU's Pet Memorial Program offers families a wonderful way to memorialize and celebrate the life of their pet while supporting the education of future veterinary care providers.

To contact the Pet Loss Hotline, call 509-335-5704 or e-mail plhl@vetmed.wsu.edu.

For more information about the WSU Pet Memorial Program or to make a donation, contact Tim Osborn at 509-335-9516 or tosborn@vetmed.wsu.edu. Information can also be found online at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-prd/memorial.aspx