

Your Dog's Weight Is Directly Related to His Heart

A healthy dog heart starts with weight control.

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Just like humans, dogs can develop an array of heart problems. Proper diet, exercise, and veterinary care can prevent many of them.

Some experts estimate that as many as 50 percent of the dogs in the United States are overweight. Depending on the size of the dog, a few extra pounds could represent a serious health threat. For example, a dog that should weigh 17 pounds but is 5 pounds overweight corresponds to a human who should weigh 170 pounds but is 50 pounds overweight.

Excess fat translates into potential health problems, including high blood pressure and heart disease.

Follow these tips to keep the weight off your pooch and maintain a healthy heart: Stick to high-quality food with the proper proportions of key nutrients. A young dog's diet should consist of 60 percent protein derived primarily from meat, eggs, and soy. Older dogs should eat about 50 percent protein to avoid strain on the kidneys. If you're not sure what foods are best, consult your veterinarian. Avoid feeding table scraps, and keep treats to a minimum. If the total calories and fat in your daily handouts exceed 10 percent of what's in your dog's regular food, you're overdoing it. Provide regular exercise. Ideally, take your dog for brisk walks in the morning and evening. Find games your dog likes to play in the park. Ensure it gets enough water before and after exercise. Remember: Dogs can go on diets just like humans. Ask your veterinarian to help with a diet-and-exercise plan. Your veterinarian also might recommend vitamins and minerals to protect your dog's heart. A daily supplement will contain many of them, including vitamin E, selenium, magnesium, and potassium. Some doctors have had good results with L-carnitine and CoEnzyme Q-10, as well. One more tip: Guard against heartworms with regular preventive medicine. Transmitted by mosquitoes, these parasites can grow as long as 14 inches and cause significant damage to the heart, lungs, and other vital organs. A simple precaution can keep your dog healthy and free of heartworms.