

## Number of Overweight Dogs Increasing, Study Finds

**Half of dogs and cats are now overweight or obese, an increase from 2007.**

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A new study by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention reveals that more than 44 percent of dogs and 57 percent of cats are now estimated to be overweight or obese.

The National Pet Obesity Day Study was conducted in October 2008 by 95 veterinary clinics, which evaluated 669 dogs ages 1 to 16 and 202 cats ages 1 to 19.

From 2007 to 2008, the number of overweight dogs and cats increased by 1 percent and 4 percent, respectively, according to the study.

“Pet obesity continues to emerge as a leading cause of preventable disease and death in dogs and cats,” said Ernie Ward, DVM, lead researcher and founder of the association. “Our pets are in real danger of not living as long as previous generations and developing serious and costly diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, and other largely avoidable conditions.”

According to the association, animals considered obese display large fat deposits over the chest, back, tail base, and hindquarters. The abdomen sags prominently and there is no waist when viewed from above. The chest and abdomen often appear distended or swollen.

Obesity rates in cats were highest at 17.8 percent while obesity rates in dogs were 9.6 percent. About 39.6 percent of all cats and 34.7 percent of dogs were classified as overweight.

Overall, the study estimates that there are 7.2 million obese and 26 million overweight dogs. The number in cats is higher, with 15.7 million estimated to be obese and 35 million overweight.

An overweight pet, according to the association, has ribs and a spine that are hard to feel or count underneath fat deposits. Waist is distended or often pear-shaped when viewed from above. The abdomen sags when seen from the side. There are typically fat deposits on the hips, base of tail and chest.

The study also found that older animals had a higher incidence of being overweight. For example, the study revealed that 52.1 percent of dogs and 55 percent of cats over age 7 were found to be overweight or obese.

“This is a particularly concerning discovery for veterinarians,” Ward said. “Extra pounds in older pets amplify any pre-existing conditions and complicate treatment. We’re seeing more and more diabetes, respiratory, and arthritic conditions in older pets as a direct result of obesity. These are often chronic, incurable, and generally preventable diseases. Pet owners need to understand that a few extra pounds on a dog or cat are similar to a person being 30 to 50 pounds overweight.”

In addition, the study revealed that small-breed dogs, such as Dachshunds, Chihuahuas, and Yorkshire Terriers, had more trouble with their weight than larger breeds, such as Labrador Retrievers or Golden Retrievers. This was attributed to the lack of exercise these small dogs get.

Interestingly, most pet owners with heavy pets accurately reported their pet’s weight status when asked by veterinary health care provider. For instance, 71.5 percent of owners with overweight or obese cats identified their cats as overweight or obese, and 60 percent of dog owners agreed with their veterinarian’s assessment of their dog’s weight.

“This tells me pet owners know their pet is too heavy,” Ward said. “It’s up to veterinarians to help pet lovers get their pet back to a healthy weight.”

For a printable chart to track your dog’s weight loss, [click here](#).