

How to Keep Your Yorkshire Terrier Fit

Feed your Yorkshire Terrier a diet based on its needs.

Kim Campbell Thornton

Picky or Packing on the Pounds? Yorkies have a reputation for being finicky, but it may be a label that's undeserved. The majority of them eat well without any encouragement. Again, however, individuals vary. Some pick at their food and eat just enough to satisfy their appetite, says Heider. This is when the owner gets frantic and starts adding more food to tempt the dog. Then there is the other type that eats everything but the kitchen sink and tends to be obese. In either case, it is not a good practice to leave food out all the time because you can't monitor the bowel movements and the dog tends to overeat.

In most cases, a finicky eater is made, not born. For owners of the truly finicky Yorkie, mixing a teaspoon of wet food in with dry kibble can make the meal a little more aromatic, so it's more appealing to the dog. To avoid creating a monstrous Yorkie that either won't eat unless the meal is prepared by a five-star chef, or one that's grossly overweight, offer meals at set times, measure food carefully and don't encourage your dog to loll around. All dogs need exercise, even Toy breeds.

I think people who own Yorkshire Terriers perceive them as more picky, and because they are tiny dogs, they oftentimes don't get the exercise they need, Dr. Mackay says. People tend to carry them around rather than let them be mobile on their own. They're a very busy dog generally, so I think a fair number of them worry their energy off. In my practice days, though, I certainly saw a fair number of them that were overweight, and those were often the patients that my clients described as being picky eaters. A 19-pound Yorkshire is not a picky eater.

A tendency to overeat is no laughing matter. A fat Yorkie is neither a pretty sight nor a healthy one. It waddles when it walks and has difficulty going very far or jumping up into a lap. Musculoskeletal problems can develop as well. Obese dogs are more prone to knee problems, or patellar luxation, a condition in which the knee pops out of place, causing the dog to walk with a skipping motion. Vertebral disk problems are also aggravated by excess body weight. (See *Is Your Yorkie Safe from Genetic Disease?* on page 100.)

The normal weight range for the breed is 3 to 7 pounds. The appropriate weight for a Yorkshire Terrier depends on the dog's frame. While 5 pounds may be normal for one dog, another may be too thin at that weight. You don't want them roly-poly, and you don't want them to sink way in at the ribs. That is the best indicator, Hildebrand says. Generally, 4 to 5 pounds is the ideal weight for a small Yorkie, 6 to 7 pounds for one that's medium size.

To gauge your Yorkies condition, perform a monthly rib check. You should be able to feel its ribs but not see them. If they're covered with a heavy layer of fat and the dog's waist has disappeared, it's time for a diet and exercise plan.

The first step is to check with your veterinarian to make sure there's not a medical reason for the weight gain. If everything checks out okay, your goal will be to bring the dog's weight down slowly and properly. Dieting is a slow process, and it requires plenty of patience. You want to bring the calorie level down, allowing the dog not only to lose fat but also to build muscle at the same time, Dr. Mackay says. If you knock the fat off very quickly but lose lean muscle tissue at the same time, the minute you stop the diet the weight comes back.