

Our Pets Need Nutrition and Moderation Too!

By Jen Muzzi, RDN/LDN, RYT-200, Chef

According to an article in USA Today, over 50% of our pet dogs are overweight or obese and canine heart disease (CHD) is on the rise. Sound familiar? It should! Over 50% of the American population is overweight or obese. Let that sink in for a moment....

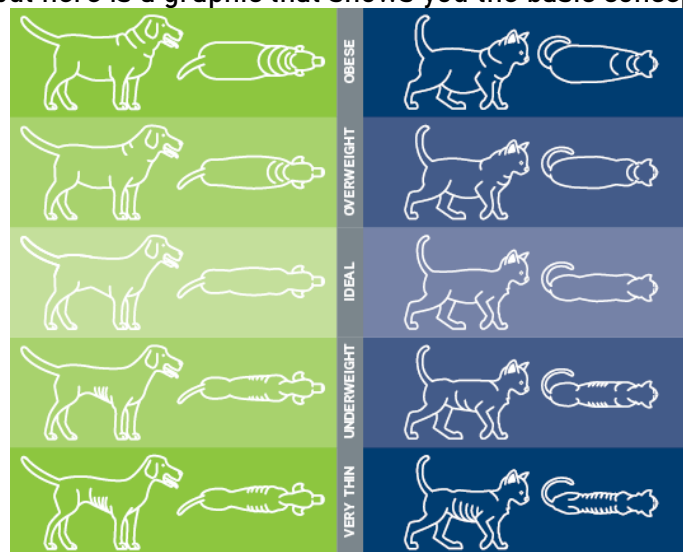
We are overweight and we are making are pets overweight too.

Animal nutrition and human nutrition aren't the same, so I inquired with UD's Lesa Griffiths. She has her PhD in Animal Nutrition from Perdue University and is a faculty member of the Department of Animal and Food Sciences. She stated:

“Obesity in dogs can be harmful to your dog’s health in a number of ways such as decreased quality of life, hypertension, earlier onset of osteoarthritis and diabetes, and increased incidence of slipped discs in some breeds. Although it is not confirmed that obesity is a direct cause of heart and respiratory diseases in dogs, it can exacerbate these conditions and make them harder to treat.”

While researchers are trying to figure out if the dog obesity rate and CHD are related, they have confirmed a link between CHD and diet. They have discovered that it's [directly related to grain free food formulas](#). Just like their human counterparts, healthy carbs should be an important part of a dog's diet. Unless there is some a specific allergy/sensitivity and is deemed necessary by the veterinarian. Dr Griffiths states, “Dogs are omnivores, not carnivores - which means diets containing grains are fine. Fiber is excellent in the diet, but too much fiber can cause diarrhea.”

Like their owners, dogs need moderation in food, increased activity and annual medical checkups (more for younger/senior dogs). Your vet will be able to tell you if your dog is of an appropriate weight, but here is a graphic that shows you the basic concept of how you can tell:



Food intake and Physical Activity in Dogs

I asked Dr Griffiths about activity and food intake in pets and she discussed that reduced activity levels happen as your pets age and sometimes after being neutered. She states, "That means that you have to reduce its food intake, or increase its activity level with exercise." She continues, "The reduction in activity and associated weight gain may be gradual, so many pet owners may not realize the need to gradually reduce food intake and/or increase activity. The addition of treats can make the situation worse."

Human Connection with Dogs

There are numerous research reports that show there's a calming, emotional effect that pet owners have with their dogs, such as:

- petting your dog can lower your blood pressure.
- Being outside for 5 minutes, has been shown to improve moods of those with depression.

If you are one for accountability with maintaining your physical activity habits, consider enlisting your dog as your workout/accountability buddy. Dr Griffiths suggests for your pets, "more frequent or longer walks and play activity." You don't have to run miles on end or hike mountains. You can go for a walk around the neighborhood or take them to the dog park. If that's not feasible for your pet, a good back yard game of fetch with a ball or a stick can be just the medicine that both of you needs. For me, one of my favorite times of the day is when I can take that break away from the laptop and walk Moe around the neighborhood. It's been a saving grace since quarantine began!

This Weeks Recipes:

This week I am baking homemade dog biscuits. Just as we are not supposed to eat cake and junk food every day, the same goes for your pet. As Dr Griffiths mentions, "A treat should be just that – a treat [or] something special – not a way to snack through the day." She also mentioned that even though the ingredients of the cake recipe are natural sugars, they are still sugars.

As is with human food recipes, there are a lot online and in print that may contain food that could be inappropriate for your dog to consume. Here is a list I've compiled:

Foods to avoid for dogs:

Onions (including onion powder)

Chocolate

Cocoa

Coffee

Grapes

Raisins

Tea

Alcohol (ethanol)

Uncooked yeast dough

Salt

Macadamia nuts

Hops

Green or unripe tomatoes/potatoes as well as their leaves and stems

Moldy foods

If you suspect your dog has consumed any of these items, call your vet immediately. Also, given that it's not confirmed **what** in the grain free formulas is causing heart disease (be it high protein or other ingredients found in those recipes) it's best to have your dogs avoid all legumes, potatoes and derivatives of these. Dr Griffiths says that she "would not promote sweet potatoes in any dog food". Best to be safe than sorry, especially when it comes to our dogs. ♥

To sum this week's blog up:

-----→Moderation in quantity and type of foods (protein, fat, carbs) + physical activity =

Healthy humans and healthy dogs.

-----→We are emotionally connected to our pets, which is good for our mental and physical wellbeing!

-----→Since, the treat recipe makes 30 treats, are made without preservatives and won't last long, there's plenty to share with other doggie pals! Don't feed them daily to your pet.

-----→Schedule your vet visits to maintain good health in your pets.

Until next time..

Chase that squirrel and Bone Appetit!

~~ Chef Jen

**Special thanks to Dr Lesa Griffiths for giving her time and professional insight to this posting



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