

OBESITY AND YOUR PET

By Carol Caisse

It's getting to be that time of year. The turkey, gravy, pumpkin pie, and maybe even a little left over Halloween candy delight our taste buds. We look forward to these delectable goodies all year long, and when the holiday season begins, we often want to gobble down everything we see. Not only is it tempting for *us* to over-indulge, but we also want to share the bounty with our beloved animals. "Oh, a little bit won't hurt you," we rationalize. "It's only once a year."

We think of indulging our pets as "only once a year," but often in reality, it is every day, and in many cases, several times a day, all year long. We tend to do it more at holiday time, and the treats we give at this time are even more calorie laden than the ones we use the rest of the year. But over treating and over feeding our pets can result in obesity which is as serious for our pets as it is for human beings. Obese pets can suffer from diabetes, heart disease, respiratory distress, high blood pressure, and cancer. It is difficult and sometimes impossible for an obese cat to groom itself. Extra weight puts undue stress on joints, making it difficult for pets to walk.

In addition to being overfed or over treated, most obese pets do not get enough exercise. It is vital to a pet's health to exercise every day. Taking your dog for a walk, throwing a ball, or allowing him to run and chase at a secure park are good ways to exercise him. You can engage your cat in batting around a cloth mouse or chasing a string that you have attached to a stick. Exercising a pet has an added perk: the pet owner will get exercise too!

How do you know if your pet is obese? According to an article in *Petcentric* which is published by Purina, there are three ways to tell:

--Rib check: Place both of your thumbs on your pet's backbone and spread both hands across its rib cage. You ought to be able to feel your pet's ribs. Actually touching your pet to perform this check is important since many pets have an abundance of fur which makes a visual check unreliable.

--Profile check: Get level with your dog or cat. Look at its profile. Ideally, the abdomen will be tucked up behind the rib cage.

--Overhead check: Looking down at your pet, determine if you can see a waist behind the ribs. Most dogs and cats at a healthy weight should have a visible waist.

It is always best to check with your vet before engaging in a weight loss or exercise program with your dog or cat. The vet can monitor your pet's progress and give you helpful tips and advice along the way.

Be kind to your pet. Feed it healthy food. Don't over feed or over treat it or give it the wrong treats, such as chicken or turkey skin, gravy, potatoes, or other high calorie people food, even though you may be sorely tempted over the holidays. Get help from your vet. And do your pet—and yourself—a big favor: include some daily exercise!