

UK
PET
FOOD

FEEDING OUR PETS FOR
OVER 50 YEARS



2024

UK PET OBESITY REPORT

Love them **madly**
Feed them **wisely**


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WELCOME

This autumn, UK Pet Food launches its **'Love them madly, Feed them wisely'** education campaign.

The campaign is close to my heart. At its centre is the total recognition that pets are cherished family members who deserve all the love and cuddles in the world. For all the joy they bring to our lives and the well-documented psychological and physical benefits, it is important that we do the best for them. Doing the best for them means providing the best care possible. And for UK Pet Food, ensuring they are fed a healthy and nourishing diet is perhaps the biggest part of this.

The education campaign focuses on understanding pets' different nutritional needs, helping owners decode pet food labels, understanding the feeding guidelines, promoting healthy weight management and building knowledge around pet food ingredients and how we deliver complete and balanced nutrition. We will also cover the drier elements—the strict rules and regulations behind the industry so that owners have complete confidence in the food they are feeding.

Yet there is a slight cautionary note about this campaign. This is the fourth edition of our Obesity White Paper. We produce a report every five years, enabling us to track trends and document expert opinion. Despite extensive efforts, pet obesity remains a persistent problem. 77% of vets say that it's getting worse, and 100% of vets we spoke to are worried about the situation¹. This compares to owners where only 4% think their pet is overweight².

The challenge is multifaceted, much like in human health, and goes beyond mere calorie intake. We have compiled this comprehensive report with expert input to examine contributing elements and look for a way forward. As always, collaboration and education will be key themes.

Through informed strategies and collective action, we hope to promote the importance of this issue and help our pets live healthier and longer lives. Though we Love them madly, we need to Feed them wisely.

Nicole Paley
Deputy Chief Executive
UK Pet Food



FOREWORD

Fat cats, rotund rabbits and dumpy dogs are sadly now the norm, rather than the exception, in our pet population and this is having a significant negative impact on both their quality and quantity of life.

Obesity is considered a multi-factorial disease in both the human and animal medical fields and while the solution can appear simple; just feed them less, in reality it is far more complex.

There is certainly the influence of an excess of calories, but we also have to consider that genetics, age, neuter status, activity levels, environment and the owner themselves all have a significant impact on a pet's likelihood of being vulnerable to obesity and their success in losing the weight.

Which makes slimming down a challenge for any pet but given it predisposes them to diseases such as arthritis, diabetes, some types of cancer and even an early death, not to mention how much it can reduce their ability to enjoy and thrive in their lives, it is absolutely vital that we, as experts in the animal space, work hard in supporting owners to help their pets shed those pounds.

Producing high quality diets that promote healthy weight right from the start, ensuring owners are well-informed in terms of the amounts to feed and how to recognise when issues might be developing, and creating meals that can nourish effectively while also aiding weight loss, are vital roles that UK Pet Food members are already excelling in, and with the information contained in this brilliant report to further inform them, can ensure they continue to do so.

Cat Henstridge BVSc MRCVS

**Vet Surgeon in first opinion small animal practice,
Veterinary Influencer as 'Cat the Vet'
& CEO Vet Pursuits**



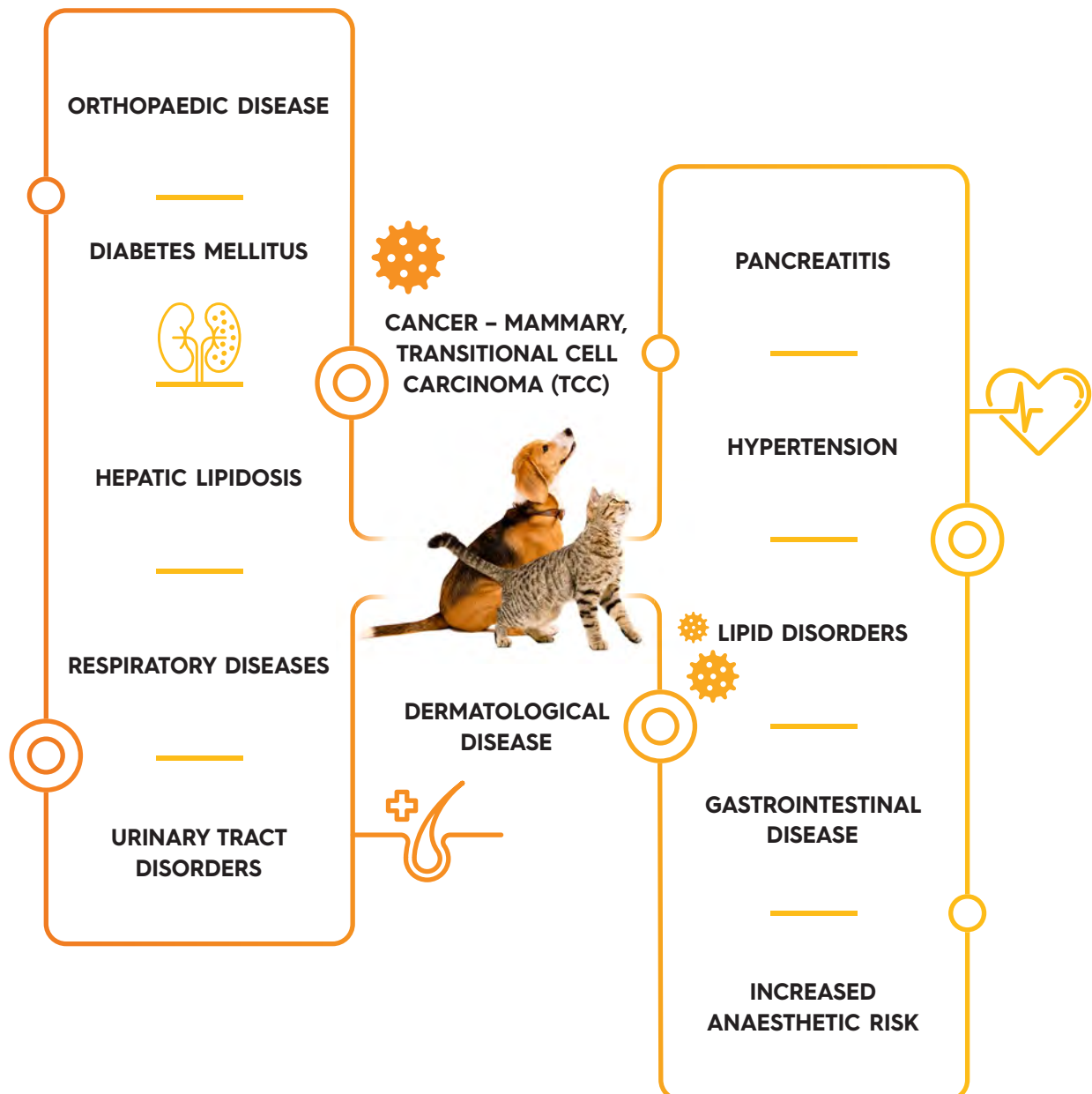
PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PET OBESITY

A MAJOR HEALTH ISSUE REDUCING PETS' QUALITY OF LIFE

The repercussions of obesity are not to be underestimated. Overweight dogs face a reduced lifespan – up to two and a half years shorter than dogs with a healthy body weight³.



Many conditions common in pets, which are associated with obesity⁴



PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PET OBESITY

A BIG FINANCIAL RISK ACCORDING TO PET INSURANCE EXPERTS

Pet insurance companies are increasingly raising awareness about weight management because they consider obesity a pre-existing condition. This can lead to higher premiums and limited coverage for obesity-related issues.



UK Pet Food spoke with Robin Hargreaves, Agria's Senior Veterinary Advisor, who emphasised, **I think the greatest significance with obesity in pets is the degree to which it exacerbates and amplifies other morbidities. Being overweight simply makes every other condition worse and more difficult to manage.**



"Taking heart disease and osteoarthritis as two obvious examples; these cases will consistently require earlier medical intervention and higher doses of medication in overweight animals, and life expectancies as well as the quality of life, will be reduced. If all cases of heart disease and osteoarthritis were at optimal body weight, quality of life under treatment would be improved, onset of treatment would be significantly delayed, and life expectancies would often be extended. Diabetes in cats can often be attributed solely to obesity, as it can be put into remission with prompt and effective weight control.

In my opinion, in simple terms, obesity accelerates ageing changes. There is no better tonic for the best possible old age than to be slim (and fit). To a degree, being active probably offsets some of the damage caused by obesity, but being overweight and inactive is a lethal combination."



Insurance companies have highlighted the number of claims for obesity-related conditions. One insurer, Animal Friends, studied 20,000 pet health records and discovered that the number of claims for treatment of arthritis had more than trebled since 2015⁶.

By ensuring a pet is healthy, happy and at their optimal weight, owners are more likely to save money on their pet in the longer term.



**RISES IN CLAIMS FOR OBESITY
RELATED CONDITIONS**

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PET OBESITY

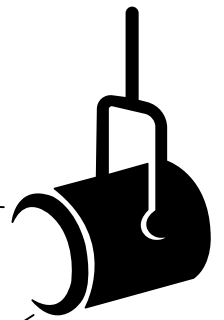
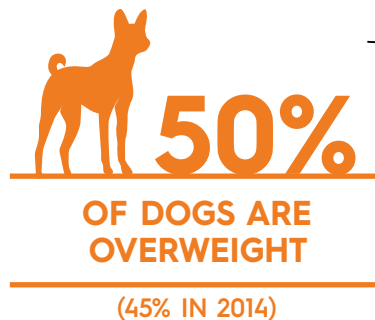
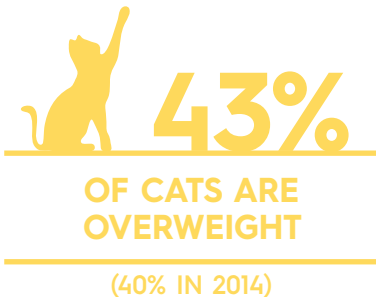
A GROWING PROBLEM FOR VETS AND AFFECTING ALL PET SPECIES



As Fabian George Blake Rivers, Veterinary Surgeon (Exotics/Small Animal/Wildlife) explains:
Pet obesity is a problem that is not only increasingly impacting cats and dogs, but the situation is also worsening for small mammals and other exotic pets. Obesity among exotic pets, including reptiles, birds and small mammals is arguably the number one interspecies issue I encounter in my practice. It both has characteristics of a symptom and a disease, reflecting broader issues in husbandry, care and predisposition.



UK Pet Food attends the London Vet Show every year and we ask vets what percentage of pets seen are overweight or obese. Our survey highlights a growing problem.¹



CAT SPOTLIGHT

“The opportunistic nature of their feeding behaviour means they may still take advantage of food even when they are not hungry. When we apply this to the domestic environment, we have a species... that lives a far more sedentary lifestyle (not having to hunt for food), which we are feeding a concentrated diet. When looked at this way, it is a wonder more cats are not obese!”

Dr Nathalie Dowgray

Head of ISFM, the veterinary division of International Cat Care

DOG SPOTLIGHT

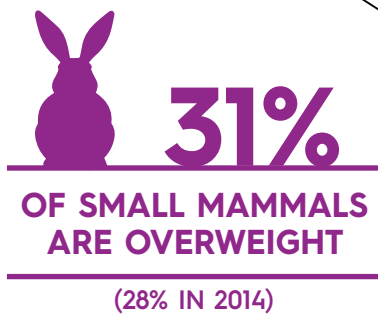
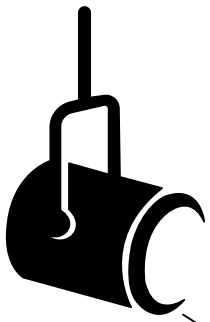
A study of over 20,000 dogs showed that some breeds were at higher risk of being obese including Pugs, Beagles, Golden Retrievers, and English Springer Spaniels⁵.

Commenting on the study, Dr Dan O'Neill, Senior Lecturer, Companion Animal Epidemiology, at the RVC, and co-author of the paper, said: “To defeat your enemy, you need to know your enemy. Obesity is the enemy of the health of our dogs.”

Royal Veterinary College (RVC)

Research conducted in 2021





SMALL MAMMAL SPOTLIGHT

"UK Pet Food research among vets found that 31% of small mammals were overweight but it is estimated that up to 48% of pet rabbits are overweight (Adji et al., 2022), and it is likely that other small mammals (guinea pigs, chinchillas, degus, hamsters, gerbils, rats & mice) are not far behind. Small mammals face many of the same challenges and consequences as dogs and cats when it comes to obesity, but these are often further emphasised by their small size, how they are fed, and the environment in which they are kept, which may differ from how they evolved."

Dr. Christine Huggett
The Pet Food Consultant



BIRD SPOTLIGHT

"Obesity is a common problem in pet birds and can be linked to the provision of seed-based diets which allow selective feeding of the high fat components, coupled with a lack of exercise: the so called 'perch potato'. Obesity in pet birds leads to a higher risk of diseases such as atherosclerosis, liver disease, tumours and arthritis.

The presence of feathers can hamper the ability to judge body condition from a distance and some birds may not tolerate handling for body condition scoring."

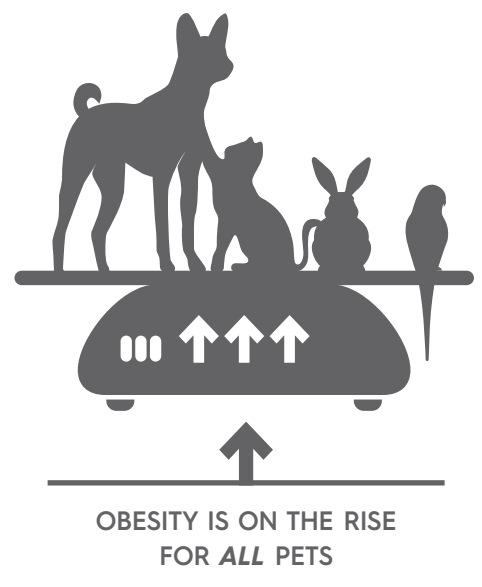
**Vicki Baldrey, BSc(Hons) BVSc
DZooMed(Avian) FHEA MRCVS**
Lecturer in Exotic Species and
Small Mammal Medicine and
Surgery

FISH SPOTLIGHT

"Overfeeding is much more common than under-feeding. Overfeeding results in incomplete digestion of food, which can lead to increased waste excreted by the fish. This combined with uneaten food can then pollute the water. A few flakes, granules or pellets per fish is sufficient. The fish should eat all the food in two minutes or less."

Donna Snellgrove

Fish Research Manager at Mars
Petcare



PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PET OBESITY

A PROBLEM FOR PET REHOMING SERVICES

Speaking to our friends in the rehoming sector, it is clear that they are impacted by pet obesity too. Not only does it contribute to reasons for rehoming, but also overweight pets stay longer in their care.



As explained by Alison Thomas, Head of Veterinary Standards at national pet charity Blue Cross: **A common reason for an owner to relinquish their pet to a Blue Cross rehoming centre is an inability to continue to afford veterinary care. A significant number of these pets are overweight and are suffering from conditions related to obesity. It is significantly more difficult to find homes for these pets due to the ongoing financial commitment of veterinary care and potentially shortened life span, leading to longer stays in our centres.**



Dr Fiona Cooke, Head of Specialist Services at Woodgreen Pets Charity added: “Being overweight can present significant challenges for pets, which may be exacerbated if they ever need to come into a rescue setting. The sudden change in circumstances, plus the additional stressors when overweight, can have a huge impact on their physical and psychological health. Even a little excess weight could cause a range of health conditions, such as arthritis, diabetes, severe heart disease, liver disease and depression, in dogs. These issues will all need treatment from a vet, which can be very expensive, especially for conditions that become chronic.

“At Woodgreen, we like to set owners and pets up for success. When someone rehomes a pet from us, we’ll routinely talk them through the importance of keeping their dog, cat or small pet in good body condition, discuss healthy diets and give advice on exercising their new pet. We also provide body condition charts in our rehoming packs for people to refer to as needed. The support can also continue at home.”



If an unwell pet comes into a charity like Woodgreen, their journey to a new home may take longer – so being overweight has a big knock-on effect for these pets.



AN OVERWEIGHT PET'S JOURNEY TO A
NEW HOME MAY TAKE LONGER

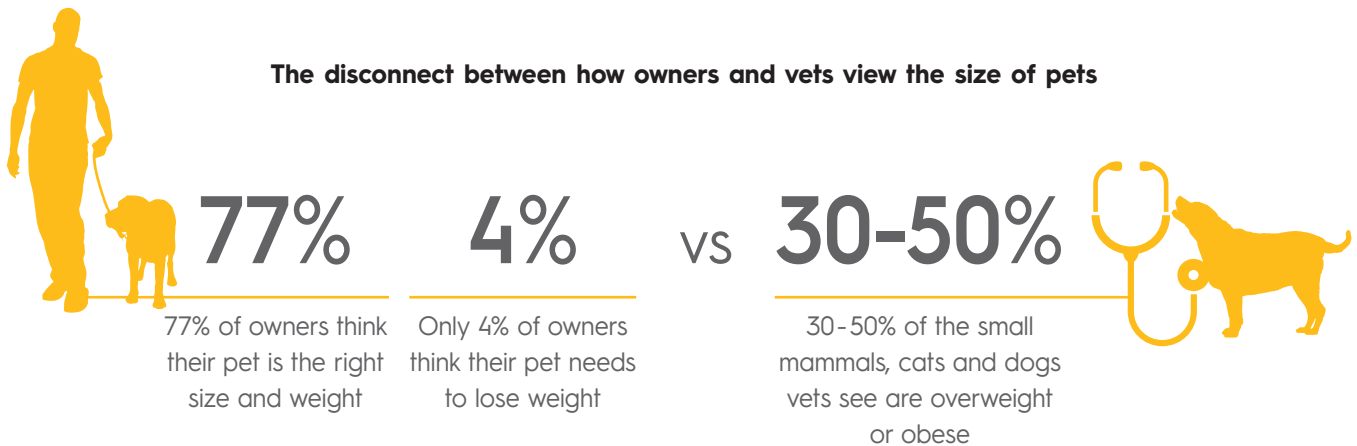
UNDERSTANDING THE GAP & BARRIERS WHY IS THERE A DISCONNECT?

COMPARING VET AND PET OWNER PERSPECTIVES ON OBESITY



Every year, UK Pet Food commissions research among 8000 households to gather pet population data. We ask a subgroup of around 2500 about pet nutrition habits and perceptions of pet obesity.² In 2024, this research shows that most pet owners believe their pets are the right weight.

The comparison of this feedback with our vet feedback and recent clinical studies shows a huge disconnect.





BRIDGING THE PERCEPTION GAP CONTRIBUTING TO A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR OUR PETS



One of the challenges we face in tackling pet obesity is the disconnect between what pet owners perceive as a healthy weight for their pets and what veterinary professionals diagnose in practice.

This discrepancy can lead to unintentional neglect of the issue, resulting in a range of health problems that could otherwise be prevented. It is therefore crucial to bridge this perception gap and create a common understanding of what a healthy pet looks like and how to maintain that healthy condition through proper feeding and pet care in general.



At UK Pet Food, we have developed a variety of educational resources aimed at supporting both pet owners and veterinary professionals. Our factsheets and posters provide valuable information on identifying healthy body conditions, understanding the risks of obesity, and adopting effective weight management practices. These resources are designed to be informative, easy to understand, and practical for everyday use.

However, we recognise that despite our best efforts, these materials have not yet achieved the level of impact we had hoped for. Both pet owners and veterinary professionals need tools that not only inform but also inspire action. Moving forward, we are dedicated to refining our approach to ensure our messages resonate more deeply and drive meaningful change.



MOVING FORWARD WITH POSITIVITY AND DETERMINATION

In the making of this report, we have spoken to many experts and, based on their opinions and our expertise, we confirm our five **'Weighty Areas of Focus'** over the next few pages:

- 1 The Role of a Complete and Balanced Diet**
- 2 Guidance on How Much to Feed**
- 3 Treating Pets Well Can Mean Treating Them Differently**
- 4 Supporting the Weight Management Journey from Day One**
- 5 Feeding Quality Information**

At the end of each section, we outline possible solutions and confirm UK Pet Food's commitments.

The journey towards eradicating pet obesity is ongoing, and we remain dedicated to this cause with renewed energy and optimism. Together, by bridging the gap in perception and providing impactful educational tools, we can ensure that our pets lead healthier, happier lives.



Sarah Hormozi

Head of Science and Education
UK Pet Food

1

WEIGHTY AREA OF FOCUS THE ROLE OF A COMPLETE AND BALANCED DIET

SETTING THE SCENE

Decades of science have gone into optimising pet nutrition and choosing a pet food is one of the most important decisions owners make for their pet's health and weight management.

How owners are feeding their pets²

48%

48% of owners exclusively feed their pet prepared pet food

52%

52% look at alternatives or supplement their pet's diet with human scraps and treats

59%

59% admit they have changed their pet's diet due to the cost-of-living crisis



SOLUTIONS

The Science behind 'Complete'

Firstly, we need to explain that extensive research and expertise goes into formulating pet food. 'Complete' prepared pet foods are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of different species and stages of life. Beyond diets tailored for young pets, there are also options for senior and neutered pets. As pets age, they may become less active, and neutering can further contribute to weight gain.

By selecting a complete diet from the word 'go' (and feeding according to guidelines), owners have the best chance of ensuring their pet stays healthy and at its optimal weight. Please read our **'Choosing a Pet Food' Factsheet** for more information. As Nicole Paley highlights: **"By providing a complete pet food, owners can have total confidence they're providing all the nutrients in the right proportions."**

A Range for all Needs

Secondly, we need to communicate that the wide range of different pet food formats to suit most purses, needs and preferences so pet owners don't need to compromise on good nutrition. Please read our **'Feeding Your Pet on a Budget' Factsheet** for more information.



UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENT 1

To educate on the role of prepared pet food in providing complete and balanced nutrition. To build on this further with educational resources to help people understand the different diet options available.

Different needs,
different foods.
Makes sense, right?



As explained by **Fabian George Blake Rivers**: "It is absolutely paramount that we start to make the right steps into understanding and making specific foods for different species. But much like the dogs and cats of this world, that specialised diets are made to reflect the huge variation between species but also nuances within those species."



2

**WEIGHTY AREA OF FOCUS
GUIDANCE ON HOW
MUCH TO FEED****SETTING THE SCENE**

Feeding a pet 'wisely' with the right food and the correct quantities is critical in ensuring they stay healthy and at the right weight. Pet food packs have feeding 'guidelines', which are a starting point for working out an appropriate daily food ration based on a pet's ideal weight (not actual weight).

The British Veterinary Association's (BVA)'s recent policy document 'Diet Choices for Cats and Dogs' highlighted that "ensuring they are fed the right amount of food is one of the clearest ways to improve health and welfare. This will also bring financial and sustainability benefits, by reducing waste products being discarded or unnecessarily eaten."

How owners work out how much to feed their pets²**63%**

63% say they follow guidelines

19%

19% admit they don't follow guidelines (or find them confusing)

18%

18% weigh out food

**SOLUTIONS****Weigh-out food**

Firstly, we need to highlight the need to follow the guidelines, which means carefully weighing food, using digital scales, as directed. If owners are not using digital scales, it is unlikely that they are meeting the exact nutritional needs of their pet. As Joy Shutt, veterinary nurse explains: "Whether feeding for weight loss or not, feeding cups should only be used in conjunction with digital weighing scales. Studies have found huge ranges of inaccuracy using cups alone, with smaller portions more likely to be overestimated, and therefore smaller pets being at even higher risk of overfeeding. It's also important to explain the 'daily' quantity that should be divided between meals."



Nicole Paley adds: We need to embrace the One Health approach. By feeding our pets just what they need, we're not only supporting their health but also being kinder to the planet.

Exactly what they need in each bowl. It's genius.

**INTERPRETING GUIDELINES**

Secondly, we need to explain that 'guidelines' are exactly that – guidelines. We must help owners interpret these guidelines to feed their pets the right amount of food. If a pet is used to eating larger quantities, tweaks can be made to the way food is given. Jollyes suggest: "Using stuffable bowls and smaller main meal bowls can help build a positive habit with smaller portions, though the food should still be weighed beforehand."

**UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENT 2**

Provide guidance on interpreting feeding guidelines, stressing the importance of using digital scales and reinforcing that adjustments may need to be made.

3

WEIGHTY AREA OF FOCUS TREATING PETS WELL CAN MEAN TREATING THEM LESS

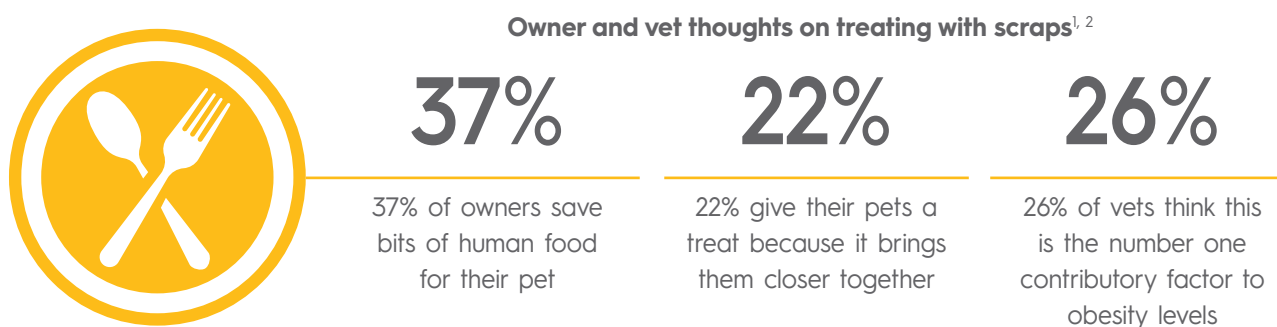
SETTING THE SCENE

Pets are part of the family and are often rewarded for their companionship and good behaviour. Owners show their appreciation in various ways, from adventurous dog walks and play sessions, to commercial treats or even human food scraps.

Dr Andrew Miller, Pet Nutritionist, says: “The humanisation of pets is a likely factor in this relationship, which leads to pet owners overfeeding.” Professor Webb comments: “Inappropriate feeding is often the product of good intentions (e.g., to show love, prevent perceived hunger), longstanding habits (e.g., sharing scraps or using treats to reward desired behaviours), and insufficient or cryptic information, rather than neglect.”

TREATING WITH HUMAN FOOD SCRAPS

Feeding pets bits and scraps of human food is a common practice, often seen as a way for pet owners to share and bond with their pets. Our research shows that:



As **Sarah Hormozi** explains: “Animals have different nutritional needs to humans, and an imbalance in these ‘treats’ can contribute to weight gain and poor health. Human food is often too rich in salt, sugar, fat, and calories for pets to consume and thrive. It typically lacks the essential nutrients and balanced energy that pets require for optimal health.”⁸

SOLUTIONS

We need to highlight the different needs of different species to clearly explain to professionals and owners why pets cannot tolerate many human foods.



Dr Andrew Miller explains:

We need to be very cognisant of all items that a dog consumes – not just the pet food in a bowl or treats/snacks designed and marketed for pets. The odd bit of cheese or biscuit, table scraps and anything else that isn’t often seen as pet food but is a significant addition to the pet’s daily calorie intake are important to be aware of and are often neglected as food in an owner’s mind.



COMMERCIALLY PREPARED PET TREATS

Commercial pet food treats have a useful role in motivating behaviour and helping when training. They can also deliver functional benefits such as teeth cleaning and nutritional support.



In fact, Alex German confirmed that "Some dental chews require around 10,000 steps to balance calorific intake!"

SOLUTIONS

We need to raise awareness that treating a pet well may mean treating them less! Treats need to be taken into account when allocating a pet's daily food intake. In addition to reinforcing the 10% rule, we need to highlight the high calorific values of some chew style treats. Jollyes point out that: "The guidelines on treats packaging assume this is the only treats product you are feeding that day. If you feed multiple types of treats and high calorie supplements, like salmon oil, this should be spread across them all."

Companion Consultancy gives advice to vet practices when broaching these tricky subjects with owners: "Open questions may seem time-consuming, but this approach is often more efficient than asking numerous closed questions to get the same amount of information. Asking "What do you feed your dog?" may yield a brand name or food type for example, but no information on treats, extras or quantities." You can read more of their advice in our Appendix on pages 22 - 23.



UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENT 3

To provide educational resources to address over-treating, including messaging on the 10% rule, unsuitable treats for pets, and alternative ways to show affection. Our campaign will promote informed treat-giving.

**Sometimes, treating us well
means treating us less.**





Dr Natalie Dowgray, at International Cat Care explains it's not all about what you feed but also how you feed: "In cats, the opportunistic nature of their feeding behaviour means they may still take advantage of food even when they are not hungry." Three of her tips to try and mimic aspects of natural feeding behaviours are:

- a. Feeding small frequent meals
- b. Increasing play and ending the session with a food reward
- c. Using food puzzles and bowl-free feeding⁹



Increasing exercise is one piece in the weight management puzzle. However, just like us, pets can injure themselves if they suddenly start doing a lot more exercise. Owners should be advised to do so slowly and with small amounts at a time.



4

**WEIGHTY AREA OF FOCUS
SUPPORTING THE WEIGHT
MANAGEMENT JOURNEY****SETTING THE SCENE**

Almost one third of vets think that the 'normalisation of fat' is the biggest factor contributing to pet obesity.¹ It mirrors a trend in human health, which are shockingly affecting an increasing number of young children too.¹⁰

The 'normalisation' of fat and levels of obesity among humans**28%**

28% think 'normalisation of fat' is biggest factor contributing to obesity

64%

64% of adults are overweight or obese

22%

22% of reception age children (age 4-5) are overweight or obese

38%

38% of children aged 10-11 are overweight

Vets (like doctors) can struggle to broach this sensitive subject. Professor Thomas Webb is an expert on behaviour, and he identifies that **"It is difficult to recognise the problem – larger pets are the norm rather than the exception, owners are (understandably) defensive, as accepting that their animal is overweight often requires accepting that their actions are potentially harming a loved animal."**

Although vets are happy to be consulted, it appears that owners are not approaching them for advice.

Owner feedback on checking pet's weight²**50%**

50% of owners have never sought vet advice on their pet's weight

15%

15% guess!

7%

Only 7% know how to feel the pet's ribs and run a proper check

1%

1% use body condition charts

SOLUTIONS

A Collaborative Approach from Day 1

Firstly, conversations about pet weight should be a collaborative and critically a 'normal' part of pet care, rather than accepting overweight pets as the norm! As vet nurse Joy Shutt emphasises, "We need to be talking about body condition from the get-go".

Vet nurse and expert in pet obesity, Georgia Woods-Lee BSc (Hons) RVN CertCFVHnut VTS (Nutrition) adds, "As every pet and owner face a unique set of circumstances as vet professionals we must listen, adapt, and come to agreements with the pet owner on what changes are going to work best for them and their pet. By approaching the conversation in this manner, a more inclusive supportive obesity care service can be provided which will promote success and improve quality of life for all. We may also need to accompany owners and pets on their journey as unfortunately, about half of the pets who are successful, will regain weight."¹¹

Supporting with Educational Tools

Secondly, at UK Pet Food, we need to collaborate with experts to equip them with all the tools to make these conversations easier. We produce a wide range of weight management tools, as do other organisations. However, we need support from the frontline to get these materials into the hands of pet owners!

CHANGE – ONE PAWSTEP AT A TIME!

Today, the pace of life is fast. We are all used to quick fixes and our desired approach to weight-loss is no different. However, as Professor Webb explains on page 20, it takes time to build healthy habits.



“Davide Stefanutti, DVM, PhD Veterinary Nutrition, adds: “New studies show that even a 5-10% weight reduction in seriously obese animals, that weigh 20-30% more than their ideal weight, is enough to achieve significant health improvements (e.g. a decrease in blood lipids, serum glucose, liver enzymes). Although the final aim is to reach an ideal body weight, this information can help pet owners stay motivated during the weight loss journey.”



UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENT 4

We will support those on the front line by helping everyone understand what a healthy weight (from day one) looks like for pets. We will also support professionals with our excellent range of weight management tools and handy tips to make tough talks with pet owners a bit easier.

5

WEIGHTY AREA OF FOCUS FEEDING QUALITY INFORMATION

SETTING THE SCENE

Fewer pet owners are visiting the vet, and this coincides with more pet owners turning to 'Doctor Google'. Search engines and social media can be incredibly useful, but it also means that pet owners (and professionals) can find a lot of conflicting information and advice – some 'fake news' too.

Pet owner visits to the vet and numbers self-diagnosing

82%

82% of vets think that owners are making fewer visits to see them¹



56%

56% of British pet owners admit they would rather diagnose their pet's illness online than visit the vet¹²



As Fabian George Blake Rivers confirms: **"It's important that the carers of exotic (and all) animals, have a trusted source to get that information because so much comes from unverified and often incorrect sources."** As detailed by the PDSA, pet owners registered with a vet are more likely know their pet's weight and body condition score.¹³



SOLUTIONS

Expert Advice

We need to work with the veterinary profession to reinforce the message to consult experts for nutrition advice. We can also work with the profession to ensure we are providing nutritional information, education and resources.

Trusted Resources

We also need to spread the word about the trusted resources available for professionals and pet owners. Many reliable sources like UK Pet Food, rehoming centres, veterinary bodies, and welfare organisations provide valuable information. However, accessing this information can be challenging, and pet owners often don't know who to trust.

We need to emphasise that UK Pet Food is the leading voice in pet nutrition. While we represent over 100 pet food manufacturers, suppliers, and the wider industry, all our resources are unbiased and don't promote specific products. We offer plenty of expert-written information on pet nutrition that professionals can freely share with pet owners.

UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENT 5



Through our work centred around our new campaign strapline: 'Love them madly, Feed them wisely', we will cut through the noise and become known as the 'go to' resource on pet nutrition. We need to shout about our website, nutrition course, and other resources (all created by experts) to ensure they are easily accessible!

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE & SOLUTIONS

A SUMMARY OF UK PET FOOD'S COMMITMENTS



1

To educate on the role of prepared pet food in providing complete and balanced nutrition. To build on this further with educational resources to help people understand about the different diet options available.

2

To give guidance on interpreting feeding guidelines, stressing the importance of using digital scales and reinforcing that adjustments may need to be made.

3

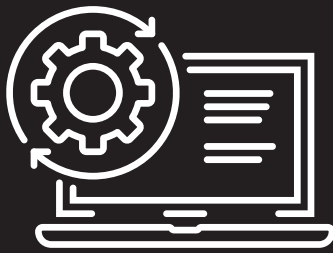
To provide educational resources to address over-treating, including messaging on the 10% rule, unsuitable treats for pets, and alternative ways to show affection. Our campaign will promote informed treat-giving.

4

To support those on the front line by helping everyone understand what a healthy weight (from day one) looks like for pets. We will also support professionals with our excellent range of weight management tools and handy tips to make tough talks with pet owners a bit easier.

5

Through our work centred around our new campaign strapline: 'Love them madly, Feed them wisely', we will cut through the noise and become known as the 'go to' resource on pet nutrition. We need to shout about our website, nutrition course, and other resources (all created by experts) to ensure they are easily accessible!



PRO TOOLKIT

By Thomas Webb, Professor of Psychology,
University of Sheffield

THE CHALLENGES OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN COMBATING OBESITY

Owners' behaviour, particularly with respect to feeding and exercise, is an important determinant of obesity among companion animals^{1, 2, 3}, but is often overlooked or avoided by the industry, veterinary professionals⁴, and even owners themselves. There are many reasons for this (e.g., the causes of obesity are multifactorial⁵, obesity can be hard to discuss); however, owners' behaviour may not receive sufficient attention because changing behaviour is difficult.⁶

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO CHANGE BEHAVIOUR WHEN IT COMES TO FEEDING OUR PETS?

Changing behaviour is difficult for two main reasons.

First, it can be difficult to recognise and discuss the problem – larger pets are the norm rather than the exception⁷, owners are (understandably) defensive as accepting that their animal is overweight often requires accepting that their actions are potentially harming a loved animal⁸, and professionals find conversations about obesity challenging.⁴

Second, it can be difficult to act, even if owners are aware – or made aware – of the problem. Many owners want to do the right thing and value their pet and their health (sometimes more than their own

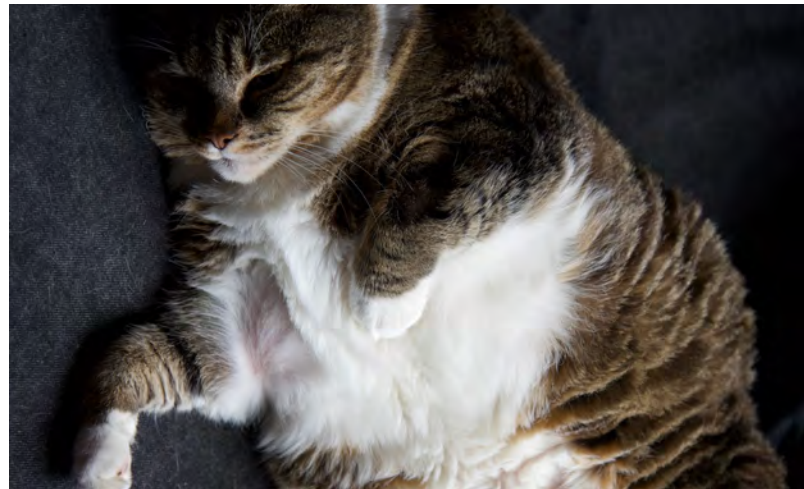
health⁹). However, translating good intentions (e.g., to feed differently) is difficult⁶ as the person may need to break habits¹⁰, manage difficult situations (e.g., the animal apparently begging for food) and work with others in the household¹¹.

HOW CAN OUR INDUSTRY AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS ENCOURAGE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE?

Addressing these challenges will not be easy, but we need to normalise conversations around weight and empathise with, rather than blame¹², owners. Inappropriate feeding is often the product of good intentions (e.g., to show love¹³, prevent perceived hunger¹⁴), longstanding habits (e.g., sharing scraps or using treats to reward desired behaviours¹⁵), and insufficient or cryptic information (e.g., on the packaging of treats¹⁶), rather than neglect. Finding the time to understand how owners think about feeding and how their household and routines are structured shows a willingness to work with owners and provide support.

WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN WE TAKE?

Talk about the problem in an empathetic way that avoids language that trivialises the problem (e.g., he's just a bit chunky¹⁴) and words that might be stigmatising



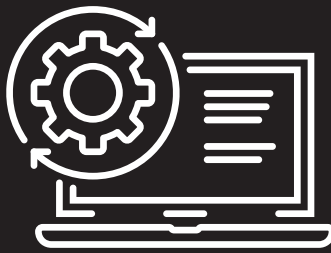
(e.g., fat¹²). Normalise the challenges (i.e., recognise that changing behaviour is difficult), but not the outcome (e.g., don't suggest that overweight is inevitable or that behaviour can't be changed).

Help owners to identify the appropriate weight / body shape for their animal⁷, provide information about how feeding practices contribute to weight (including ongoing work to improve labelling on pet food¹⁵), but then don't assume that education is enough.¹⁸ Help owners to translate good intentions into action, establish healthy practices, and deal with challenging situations.

Our help sheet might be a useful tool in this regard.



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PRO TOOLKIT

By Companion Consultancy



TOP TIPS TO SUPPORT VETS COMMUNICATING WITH PET OWNERS

1. CHANGING OWNER BEHAVIOUR IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PET WEIGHT LOSS

And that change won't happen until the owner is ready. If clients don't perceive there is a problem, they are unlikely to engage. Being empathetic, non-judgemental and supportive will build trust and guide owners to a point where they will take action.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTAND THE CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Recognising the client's viewpoint helps build trust and rapport. It ensures the client feels heard and valued, which can lead to more honest, open communication about their pet's diet and lifestyle.

3. USE OPEN QUESTIONS TO GET A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY

Open questions encourage detailed responses and provide a fuller picture of the pet's nutritional intake. This approach helps gather important information without making the client feel interrogated or defensive. For example, "Tell me about your daily feeding routine."

4. ADD A TIMESCALE TO YOUR QUESTION

Adding time points provides clients with a structure and aids recall.¹ For example, "Talk me through everything

you feed your cat from when you first get up in the morning until last thing at night."

5. ALLOW OWNERS TIME TO TALK

Open questions may seem time-consuming but this approach is often more efficient than asking numerous closed questions to get the same amount of information. Asking "What do you feed your dog?" may yield a brand name or food type for example, but no information on treats, extras or quantities.

6. TALK ABOUT FUTURE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BENEFITS

"By switching Bella's diet to a low calorie, nutritionally balanced option we can help her lose weight safely. This will not only improve her overall quality of life but also reduce the risk of developing conditions like diabetes and joint issues, helping her stay active and healthy for many more years."

7. OFFER CLIENTS CHOICE

Clients expect to be involved in decision making and that includes being presented with options.^{2 3} Involving clients fosters collaboration, making clients feel more in control and less likely to be sceptical about any recommendations.



8. FINISH THE CONSULTATION WITH A CLEAR RECOMMENDATION

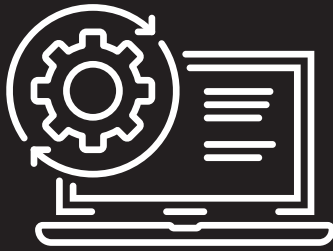
Concluding with clear, tailored advice increases adherence to the plan. In one study, pet owners were seven times more likely to stick to a treatment plan when given clear recommendations.⁴

ABOUT COMPANION CONSULTANCY

Companion Consultancy is a specialist PR and communications agency run by vets. With a background in veterinary practice and the pet industry, the Companion team is able to provide insight and technical understanding to develop effective and engaging strategies.



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PRO TOOLKIT

By Joy Shutt BSc(Hons) RVN C-SQP
DipNCS(RVNCons) Head Veterinary Nurse,
BVNA Advocate

TOP TIPS TO SUPPORT VET NURSES RUNNING WEIGHT MANAGEMENT CLINICS

1. ASSIGN TIME AND SPACE

Dedicate a specific room or use available time during breaks in the vet schedule to run the clinic. Ensure the space is equipped with essential tools like computers and scales. Training staff is vital to ensure a consistent message, improve client service, and build team confidence.

2. INVITE CLIENTS TO ATTEND

Promote the clinic through in-practice advertisements, social media, and the practice website. When inviting clients, ask for permission to discuss their pet's weight, understanding that readiness to change varies. Use positive language, focusing on the benefits of reaching the ideal bodyweight rather than using terms like "fat" or "obese." Vets should refer clients to the nursing team, and a clear protocol should be established to ensure compliance with legal guidelines.

3. STRUCTURE THE CONSULTATIONS

Schedule initial consultations as double appointments to allow sufficient time for introductions, patient assessment, and developing an action plan with the client. Sending a nutritional history questionnaire in advance can save time and help both the client and nurse prepare. Use checklists during consultations to ensure consistency.

4. PREPARE EQUIPMENT AND RESOURCES

Ensure availability of species-specific, calibrated scales, tape measures, cameras, and body condition score charts. Regularly test scales for accuracy. Prepare client packs with action plans and other resources to support the consultation process.

5. OPEN THE CLINIC AND SET THE SCENE

Start consultations by welcoming the client warmly and explaining the process in a supportive, non-judgemental manner. Set clear expectations for the consultation and emphasise that the plan is a collaborative effort that can be adjusted as needed.

6. CARRY OUT THE PATIENT ASSESSMENT

Measure and record the pet's bodyweight, body condition score (using a 9-point scale), and key body measurements. Use these findings to help the client understand their pet's condition. Determine the ideal bodyweight and set a realistic target weight based on factors like age, comorbidities, and the amount of weight to be lost.



7. AGREE ON THE ACTION PLAN

Recommend a safe diet, daily feeding amounts, and necessary changes to exercise. Incorporate treats or alternatives as needed. Ensure the recommendations are practical and affordable for the client. Provide clear communication guidelines and share your contact details.

8. ALWAYS BOOK THE NEXT APPOINTMENT

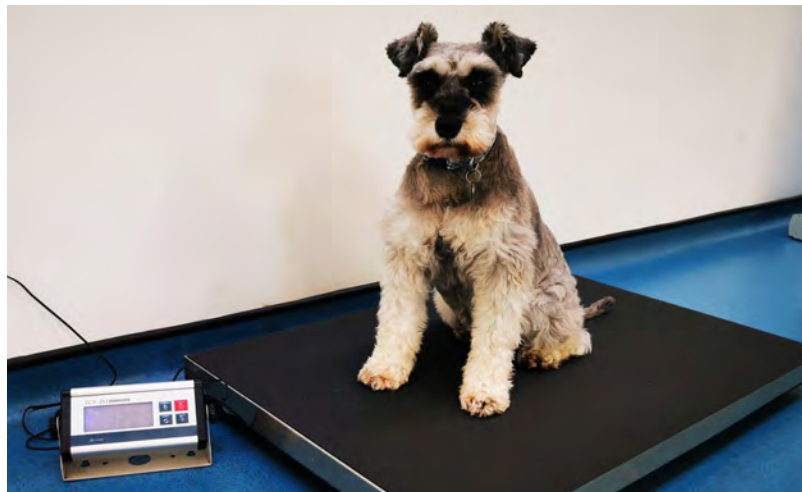
Schedule the next consultation before the client leaves to maintain momentum. Aim for consistency by booking with the same nurse. During rechecks, discuss progress and make adjustments as needed. Encourage open feedback to foster trust and prevent drop-offs.

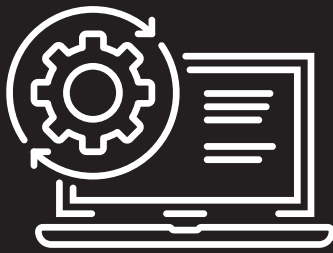
9. ACHIEVE THE TARGET WEIGHT

Celebrate reaching the target weight and milestones along the way. Provide a certificate and, with permission, share the success story to inspire others. Recognise the client's efforts in improving their pet's health.

10. MAINTAIN THE NEW WEIGHT LONG-TERM

Maintenance is key, as up to 50% of pets may regain weight. Continue with the therapeutic diet, gradually adjusting feeding amounts to stabilise weight. Schedule regular follow-up visits, gradually extending the intervals as the weight stabilises.





PRO TOOLKIT

By Annabel Battersby,
Technical Manager,
Jollyes

CHECKLIST FOR RETAILERS ON COMMUNICATING WITH PET OWNERS

1. EACH DAY IS ABOUT PROGRESSION, NOT PERFECTION

a. It takes time to build healthy habits. Though it can be demoralising to not see the results you want in the first week or two, they will come in time with positive consistency.

b. Weight loss and building muscle should take time. To see your positive progress, take a photo of your dog standing up from the top and the side so you can see your progress week by week. Many pet stores also have scales you can use to measure your pet's weight each time you go shopping.

2. PATIENCE IS KEY

a. Sudden, significant changes are hard to maintain. If you are trying to help your pet lose weight, suddenly removing all treats and significantly reducing their main meals will likely make them confused and unhappy. Make a weekly plan of the positive change you will focus on that week, and reflect back at the end of the month on all the positive changes you were able to maintain. This will help you see what you and your pet may need to work more on the following month.

b. If your pet has become used to table scraps (e.g. cheese or ham) being added to their dinner, and now

will not eat without them, try adding some warm water to the bowl to increase the smell. Alternatively a small amount of complete wet food could be added, in place of some of the kibble, to match the texture of the table scraps they have had before.

3. COUCH POTATO TO ULTRA MARATHON RUNNER

a. Just like us, pets are likely to injure themselves if they suddenly start doing a lot more exercise than they normally do. This can be more serious with older pets or those who have had significant injuries in the past. To increase their exercise slowly, try adding one more light walk, e.g. 10 minutes on lead, walk each day, in addition to their normal walk. Carrying extra weight will put more stress on your pet's joints, so by building up their exercise slowly it will help avoid adding extra stress somewhere your pet may already be sore.

4. WEIGHING AND MEASURING

a. Double check the packaging on your pet's food to see how much they should be eating for their current weight. Using a set of kitchen scales, weigh this out and see how it compares to what you normally feed. It will be enough calories for your pet, so don't worry if the bowl looks less full than before. If you see a significant difference to what you normally feed, reduce



the amount down to this level over a week or two to help build the habit of using the scales every day. Once you are at this level, reduce the amount you feed by 10% every 2 weeks until your dog is at a healthy weight.

b. The guidelines on treats packaging assume this is the only treats product you are feeding that day. If you feed multiple types of treats and high calorie supplements, like salmon oil, this should be spread across them all.

5. LITTLE TWEAKS

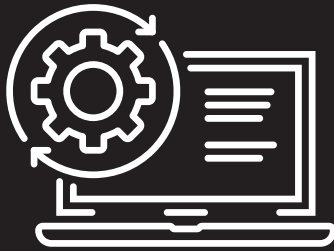
a. If your pet eats their food very quickly then asks for more, making it hard not to give extra treats, then they may benefit from a food based toy for their dinner. These are available for both dry foods, e.g. snuffle mats, and wet or raw foods, e.g. stuffable toys.

b. Using stuffable bowls and smaller main meal bowls can help build a positive habit with the smaller portions, though the food should still be weighed beforehand.



Annabel Battersby,
Technical Manager,
Jollyes





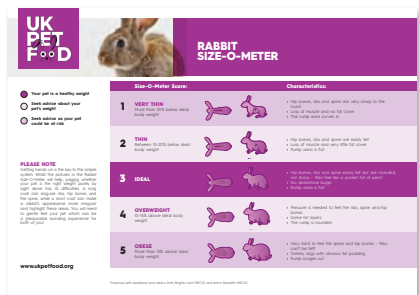
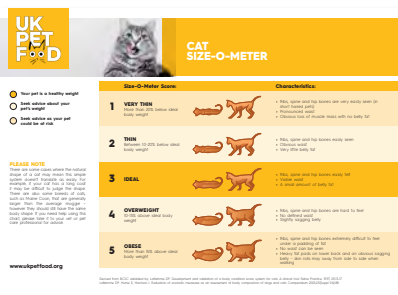
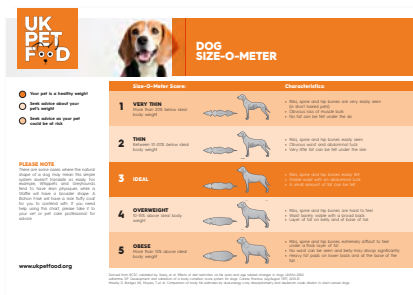
ONLINE TOOLS & RESOURCES

A SUMMARY OF UK PET FOOD'S EDUCATIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR OWNERS

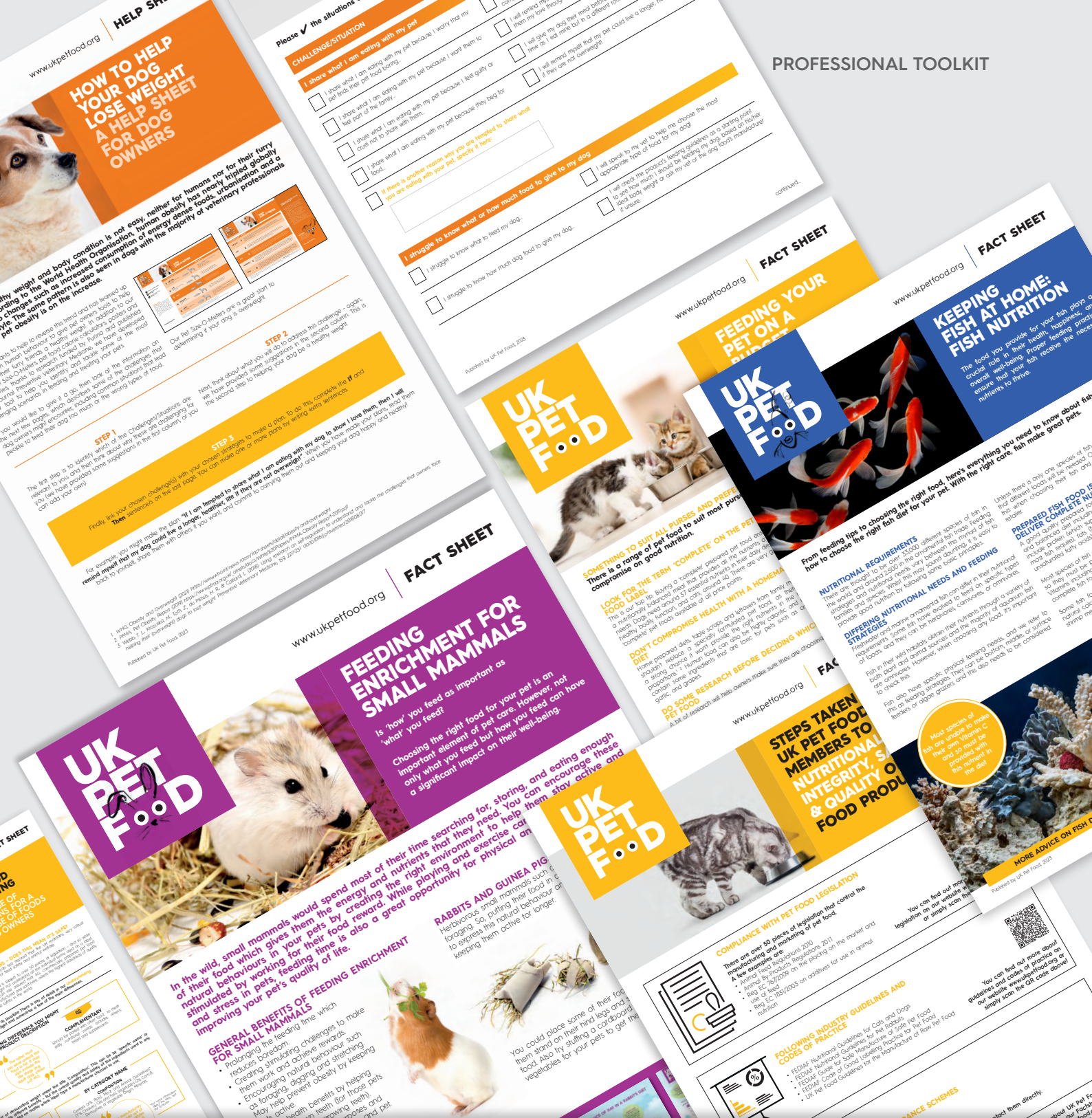
At UK Pet Food we have many, many free online resources to help pet owners understand pet nutrition and manage their pet's weight. Here are just a few examples...



Download our **Step-by-Step Guide** via our online Resource Centre



All our **Pet Size-O-Meters** and further **Weight Management** information can be found **on our website**



MORE ADVICE ON DIETS AND NUTRITION CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.UKPETFOOD.ORG

THANK YOU TO OUR EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS



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VetCompass study of 22,333 dogs
- ⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/18/rise-in-arthritis-among-dogs-is-down-to-them-being-overweight-ve/>
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- ⁹ More advice from Jollies in the Appendix on pages 26 – 27
- ¹⁰ Data from the National Child Measurement Programme published by NHS Digital. Figures are rounded
- ¹¹ Long-term follow up after weight management in obese dogs: The role of diet in preventing regain, A.J. German, S.L Holden, P.J. Morris, V.Biourge, The Veterinary Journal 192 (2012)
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