

# Strict portion control, exercise needed to reduce dog's weight

**Dear Dr. Thompson:** At our 6-year-old Labrador's recent check-up she had gained a few more pounds and our veterinarian gently suggested that she was becoming seriously overweight. We have her on a diet food but we are obviously not being successful in getting the weight off. We both work, so exercise during the week is difficult. Any help would be appreciated.

Your situation is not unique and unfortunately you have a couple factors working against you in your efforts to trim some weight from her. A dog's metabolism starts to slow as she ages and around 6 or 7 is when that starts to set in. Her breed is also extremely prone to being overweight as well.

Insulin-dependent diabetes, heart failure, and strain on joints and ligaments are the major health risks associated with obesity in dogs. Cats can also be at risk for a life-threatening liver condition called hepatic lipidosis when obese. Cruciate ligament tears of the knee have a definite genetic link in many breeds and Labs are especially prone when overweight.

When discussing weight loss with my clients I often stress there is a difference between simple and easy. Losing weight is simple — consume fewer calories than you burn. However, as we all know, that is far from easy. Another factor working against you is that pet food bags have wide-ranging feeding guidelines. A one-cup difference in what is needed for a dog her size means being 20 to 30 pounds overweight in her lifetime. Different brands have dramatic variations in the amount of calories in one cup of food as well.

I suggest a few steps for getting our pets to lose weight successfully. Start by establishing exactly how much your dog needs to eat every day and measure the food with a standard eight-ounce measuring cup. Many veterinary offices have free cups the food companies provide that you can leave in the food bag. They may also be able to deter-



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**ASK THE VET**

mine exactly how many calories are in a cup of the food you are feeding and what the caloric needs are for your size dog. You can also switch to a low-calorie treat, such as baby carrots or biscuits broken into smaller pieces. Sometimes this alone is all that is needed for some dogs. Seventy-five or 80 calories in a dog treat adds up quickly over time. You can help your dog stay satisfied with a few smaller meals through the day as well. This means less fat deposition associated with one or two larger meals.

Exercise is essential. Start out slowly to avoid any injuries since she may not be in the best shape. Make a commitment to share a more active lifestyle and by exercising shortly after mealtime you encourage more burning of calories and storage in muscles rather than in fat. Even if the weather is bad you can put a leash on her and climb up and down the stairs or walk around the house for 15 to 20 minutes. Your neighbors may think you are off your rocker but it is the best gift you can give your dog.

Good luck, and be realistic. A pound or two a month is healthy weight loss in a dog her size and I strongly recommend monthly weigh-ins at your veterinarian's office. They will be glad to help you keep track.

*Questions for Dr. Gary Thompson can be e-mailed to [askthevet@theblade.com](mailto:askthevet@theblade.com) or mailed to The Blade, Attn. Ask the Vet, 541 North Superior St., Toledo, OH 43660. Dr. Thompson regrets that he cannot answer individual letters.*