

Paw Prints #11 June '07

Pet Obesity, cont'd

Last month's column started a discussion about the frequency and dangers of pet obesity. 25 - 40% of the dogs and cats presented to veterinarians are either obese or overweight. This condition predisposes pets to a wide variety of serious illnesses including diabetes, liver disease, respiratory problems, and probably shortens lifespan considerably as well.

This is a preventable and treatable problem that starts with our feeding habits and lifestyle choices. Too many calories and too little exercise simply add up to fat pets!

Cats have very special dietary requirements that only recently have been recognized by veterinary nutritionists. Unlike dogs and people, cats are obligate carnivores; they cannot live as vegetarians. Cats need high protein, high moisture, and low carbohydrate meals in smaller and more frequent servings than dogs. Their stomachs are smaller, their intestinal tract is shorter, they don't drink as much water, and they lack some enzymes needed to digest carbohydrates that dogs have.

Simply put, cats were built for hunting and eating small rodents. The hunting activity provided the exercise and the interval feeding. It took time and effort to make a catch that was small, high in moisture and protein, and low in sugars and starches which are carbohydrates. I am not recommending feeding cats live mice!!

Along came man bringing cats in to share our homes and lives and offering up a large bowl of tasty dry cat food 1-2 times a day. Dry cat food is higher in sugars and starches and, obviously, dryer than canned food. The confinement to our home reduces so many of the outdoor risks and diseases, but limits the exercise. A perfect formula for a fat kitty, don't you think?

Cats really should have at least a portion of their diet as canned food on a daily basis. Meals should be smaller and more frequent, preferably 3-5 times a day. An excellent aid for helping measure cat food is a 2 tbsp. scoop that equals a 1/8 measuring cup. The caloric density of different cat foods varies considerably, but most cats do very well fed a level 1/8 cup of dry food 2-3 times daily, and 1/8 to 1/4 cup of canned food 2 times daily. Fresh water should always be available.

Exercise is part of this formula for both dogs and cats. Perhaps more on that subject next month. Til then, healthy pets, happy people!

Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the e-mail link at www.ameranimal.com