

# Fitness check for pets



VETERINARY  
MEDICAL CENTER  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>

## An ounce of prevention...is worth a pound of cure

This has never been truer. Our goal is for your “best friend” to live a long and healthy life. Here’s a tip to help assure that happens.

Many pet parents can tell if their pet is obese but what they might not realize is that our pets can suffer from weight-related problems long before they become obese. Especially in our canine companions, studies have shown that as little as 15% over their healthy ideal weight can shorten their lives by up to 2 years! Being just a little overweight can accelerate the development of painful joints, lameness, and the progression of arthritis and the need for pain meds to live a comfortable life. If feline friends become portly, it increases their risk for developing diabetes, breathing problems, and arthritis.

There are simple ways to prevent unhealthy weight gain before the damage is done and it’s a lot easier than trying to lose weight later.

- Talk to your veterinary healthcare team about food recommendations when your pet is spayed or neutered. Your pet’s nutritional needs change and they require 25% fewer calories after surgery.
- Learn to do a body condition score (BCS) and check your pet’s BCS once a month and maintain a healthy 5/9 by feeling over their ribs.



**Ideal**  
Turn your hand over, palm down and feel over the back of your hand. When your pet’s ribs feel like this, it’s just right - healthy lean BCS 5/9!



**Overweight**  
Put your palm up, fingers extended facing the ceiling. Run your fingers over the base of your fingers - this is too heavy.



**Underweight**  
Lightly run your fingers over your knuckles as you make a fist. If you imagine those knuckles were your dog/cat’s ribs, this would be too thin.

- Generally, your pet’s body weight at one year of age is close to their healthy weight and you can use that as a guide to keep them healthy.

Talk with your pet’s healthcare team to discuss questions you have about choosing the right food and making sure your pet keeps a fit body condition for a healthier life.

For more information, please visit [www.vmc.umn.edu/about-us/specialties-services/nutrition](http://www.vmc.umn.edu/about-us/specialties-services/nutrition)