



## Who Doesn't Love Treats?

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Leading with Technical Expertise - White Paper

Leah Lambrakis & Jarrod Kersey, Department of Technical Services

### Pet Obesity – A Rising Epidemic

As a leading manufacturer in the pet food industry, we at Simmons Pet Food not only have a passion for creating and producing food for our pets, we also deeply care for the health and wellbeing of our furry family members, and for yours. According to the Association of Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP), pet obesity has been on the rise for almost a decade, with almost 60% of cats and dogs in the United States being overweight or obese <sup>(1)</sup>. This increasing trend is concerning, as obesity is directly related to a multitude of health issues that can lead to a shorter life span of our beloved pets.

How did we get here? Improper diet selection? Too many treats? Not enough exercise? Inadequate feeding guidelines? Or simply overfeeding?

Yes, to some or all the above. Layer on social isolation.

Not only did the pandemic strengthen the human-animal bond, a recent study found that it also impacted the feeding habits, activity levels and the waistlines of our pets. Hill's Pet Nutrition, in partnership with Kelton Global, conducted this survey among 1,021 dog and cat owners and 257 veterinarians at the end of 2020 <sup>(2)</sup>.

The key highlights from the survey are as follows:

- 🐾 71% of pet professionals say the pandemic has impacted the way pets eat
- 🐾 33% of pet parents with an overweight pet said their pet became overweight during the pandemic
- 🐾 53% of pet parents said they gave their pets treats for no reason

The challenge is that these added treats and food offerings may be high in calories and low in nutritional value, leading to excessive weight gain and body fat. Obesity can be considered a form of malnutrition as the animal may not be consuming optimal levels of key essential vitamins, minerals, amino acids and other nutrients <sup>(3)</sup>. Over time, this can ultimately lead to illness and disease.

### Food ≠ Love

Weight gain and obesity can be the result of several factors such as breed, age, activity level, spay/neuter status, environment, genetics, overall health status, and of course diet composition and lifestyle. However, one of the greatest influences of a pet's feeding regime and outcome are the choices made by us, the pet parents!



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Showing love through food feels good by nature. Our pets are our family and for many pet parents, food equals love. Providing our pets with the best quality of life starts with proper nutrition and there is no question that it feels very rewarding to please our pets with tasty meals and treats. Even the authors of this paper partake in enhancing our pet's bowls with a variety of delicious and nutritious food items! However, as with our own diets, moderation and thoughtful food choices are critically important for long term health, and ensuring the bowl is nutritionally balanced is key to achieving this goal.

Food for thought – changing the ways that we show love to our pets from food to activities such as play, interaction, cuddles and exercise can be even more rewarding for both our pets and ourselves!

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*“Obesity is the number one health threat pets face, and the most important pet health decision owners make each day is what and how much they feed”.*

*- Dr. Ernie Ward, Founder, APOP<sup>(1)</sup>*

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### Raising Awareness

Gaining a better understanding of our pet's ideal body weight and overall body condition is a great start. Poor recognition of weight status and body condition score (BCS) by the pet parent is often observed by veterinarians, and the topic of the animal's weight status during wellness visits tends to be a sensitive one. Many of us can relate to quickly brushing aside a possible weight issue with the excuse of an overdue haircut – “he's not chubby, he's fluffy!”.

There are several tools and resources available for the pet community that can provide insights to assessing a pet's health status. As an example, the World Small Animal Veterinarian Association (WSAVA) has published specific BCS guidelines that can be accessed through these links: [WSAVA BCS Dog](#) & [WSAVA BCS Cat](#) <sup>(4)</sup>.

As you become familiar with your pet's body condition score, consider making the following changes as part of your pet's weight management journey:

- ✿ Work with your animal health and nutrition expert to calculate the correct amount of daily calories for ideal body weight.
- ✿ Begin logging all food offerings, including treats, toppers, fresh foods, dental chews and pill pockets.



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- 🐾 Interview your household as there may be more food events in a day than you know!
- 🐾 Limit treats to 10% of total calories offered per day.
- 🐾 Use a scale to weigh the grams of food vs. a measuring cup.
- 🐾 Get active with your pet! Ensure adequate daily exercise – an ode to the saying of “walk a hound, lose a pound”.
- 🐾 Read pet food labels, ask questions and make informed decisions about your pet’s daily food regime.

Simply (or not so simply) restricting the current food may not be the appropriate approach when beginning a weight loss or weight management program, as this can also lead to a reduced intake of essential nutrients. Speak to your animal health and nutrition expert about creating the right purpose-formulated diet plan to aid in proper weight loss; targeting specific nutrient ratios and ingredient sources may best influence weight loss, while ensuring proper nutrient density.

The optimization of key macro nutrients such as protein to promote lean muscle mass, and fiber to increase satiety, can benefit both cats and dogs during weight loss. In turn, the close management of fat and carbohydrate intake is important to aid in reducing the storage of fat. Other supplemental nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, L-Carnitine and anti-oxidants may also be recommended to facilitate weight loss as part of the total diet regime <sup>(5,6)</sup>.

### Stick with it!

Sticking with a consistent feeding regime and staying mindful of total calories offered can be challenging for pet parents. Restricting food and treats may not feel great and we understand that it is difficult to deny those adorable faces an indulgence for every good deed. Trying rewarding with treats after a good round of catch & play – now that’s positive reinforcement!

We can all agree, *who doesn't love treats?* However, if we change the behavior, we can change the outcome, and this needs to begin with careful and informed feeding practices. Feel comfort in that you are doing right by your pet so that they live a long and healthy life. At Simmons Pet Food, we want to be responsible players in the pet food industry by encouraging mindful feeding and treating to keep the pets we love healthy.



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**Our Commitment** – Leading with Technical Expertise – Leah and Jarrod are here to provide guidance and insights – do not hesitate to connect with us at Simmons Pet Food, [pfccomments@simfoods.com](mailto:pfccomments@simfoods.com). We would love to hear from you and be part of your pet's nutrition solution!

### Literature Referenced

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