



## Get the Scoop on Feline Obesity - Too Many Fat Cats!

By *STH* Volunteer Phyllis Smith

I had a foster cat a few years ago that got dumped at the shelter weighing 27 pounds. She couldn't walk more than 5 steps without having to rest and her groin area was completely raw with urine scald because of her inability to clean herself or properly use a litterbox. It took several months to get her to a point where she would use a litter box and didn't require daily baths to keep her skin clean. I put her on a high protein/low carb diet of canned food and strictly controlled her caloric intake. A year and a half later she was down to 15 pounds and remains at that weight today due to the diligence of her adoptive parents. I did a lot of research while I was fostering her and this article is meant to share that experience with you. It is not meant to replace the information you would get from your own veterinarian.

Feline obesity is a very real and serious problem. Indoor cats don't burn off a lot of excess calories climbing trees or hunting for their own food. They sleep on the sofa, walk a few feet to a food bowl full of high carb/low protein kibble, and then go back to the sofa to sleep some more. Do you give your cat human food? A one-ounce piece of cooked chicken can have as many as 50 calories which is nearly 25% of the daily caloric requirement for a 10 pound cat. Just imagine how many calories your cat is getting if you're giving it cheese or potato chips! Obesity can cause many health problems such as diabetes, joint problems, and skin infections if the animal is too obese to be able to properly clean its entire body.

Putting an obese cat on a diet should not be done without the guidance of a veterinarian. Cutting calories too quickly can cause Hepatic Lipidosis, an often fatal condition caused by the liver not being able to process fat properly. For a mildly overweight cat, a slight reduction in calories will usually be sufficient to get the extra weight off. Weigh your cat frequently to make sure he's not losing too quickly or maybe not losing at all. Make minor adjustments to the amount you are feeding as needed. A safe rate of weight loss is 1-2% of their CURRENT weight. The formula I use for my chubby foster cats is quite simple.

$$(13.6 \times \text{goal weight in pounds}) + 70 = \text{daily caloric intake}$$

$$\text{For a cat with a goal weight of 10 pounds: } (13.6 \times 10) + 70 = 206 \text{ calories per day}$$

Not all foods are created equal. The brand of low calorie dry kibble I use contains 261 calories in 1 cup. There are other "diet" cat foods on the market with as much as 460 calories in a cup. If your cat should weigh 10 pounds and needs 206 calories per day, he's not going to lose weight being given 1 cup a day of either of these foods. If you feed the 460 calorie food, your cat is getting more than twice what his daily caloric intake should be and he will actually gain weight while on a food that claims to be for weight loss.

Dry kibble is often full of carbohydrates which are not as important as meat protein. Tigers and lions in the wild don't eat salads. The minimal amounts of grains they consume are from the stomachs of their prey. Read the label on your current food and see how much of it is corn, rice, or other grains. Some pet foods even contain SUGAR! Be an educated consumer and read your labels. Many canned foods have added grains and are often not as "meaty" as you are led to believe by advertising.

Putting a cat on a weight loss program can be challenging if you have more than one cat. I put the food for my skinny, athletic cats on a table or on top of the washing machine because an obese cat usually can't get there. There are suggestions online for making adjustments to a dog crate so that only the skinny cats can get through the door to eat. You will need to be creative and figure out what works best for your house.



There are charts available online that give the caloric content of many of the dry and canned pet foods on the market. Many brands actually have them on the labels. Do your homework and find the best food for your pet. You want one that will allow him to eat enough to feel full because nobody wants a starving cat screaming at them when the bowl is empty. Cats have different metabolic rates, just like people so if one food doesn't seem to be working, don't give up...try a different one with a different protein content. Be sure to keep your veterinarian informed of the diet you plan to put your pet on and weigh your pet every few days to make sure the weight isn't coming off too quickly.

Good luck!