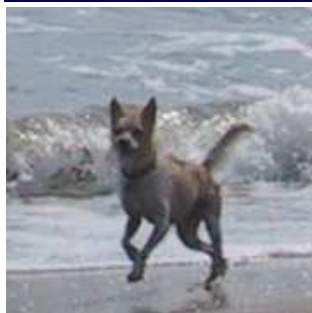


The Dog Food Project

I've seen a look in dogs' eyes, a quickly vanishing look of amazed contempt, and I am convinced that basically dogs think humans are nuts. - John Steinbeck



Canine Obesity

Obesity is not only a rampant problem in the human population, but sadly also in dogs.

Cornell University's December 2002 issue of the "Cornell Chronicle" mentions the results of a 14-year study, which found that eating less results in healthier, longer lives and that dogs forced to eat 25 percent less of the same balanced diet than their littermates lived significantly longer and suffered fewer canine diseases. What more could pet owners wish for than improving health and extending the lifespan of their companions?!

Yet reality looks vastly different. Being overweight is one of the most frequent health concerns people mention when they contact me for a consultation. When I am out and about, I also see far more dogs who are clearly overweight (with their owners in complete and utter denial!) than ones who are at least at a good weight or even in truly great body condition ? and those are almost exclusively performance dogs.

The first thing people turn to when deciding to do something about their dog's weight are usually so called "Lite", "Less active" or "Weight Management" products that are calorie-reduced, or even prescription diets from a veterinarian.

Experience with my own clients taught me that this approach usually doesn't work out too well. While strictly logically "fewer calories eaten than required for weight maintenance" equals "weight loss", it's not that simple, and "traditional" low-protein/low-fat, high-carb/high-fiber diets leave a lot to be desired when looking at nutritional value.

Dogs are animals with a carnivorous background, meant to live on a diet of predominantly meat and fat, with a natural moisture content of about 65-75%. The natural diet of a canine, which its digestive system is adapted to, also contains only small amounts of carbohydrates.

Especially simple carbohydrates can cause severe spikes and drops in blood sugar levels, which make the dog feel uncomfortable and hungry. Fat creates a sensation of satisfaction and sources of healthy, essential fatty acids not only help with weight loss but also support the immune system.

Protein is required to supply the building blocks for renewal and maintenance of the body's cells, from muscle tissue to organs, skin and coat, so reducing it too much usually quickly results in loss of lean muscle mass, poor skin and coat quality and sluggish behavior.

I have found that a higher protein content of the diet, along with moderate amounts of high-quality, healthy fats and a low percentage of simple carbohydrates is more conducive to weight loss than the traditional reducing foods.

Diets formulated this way are highly palatable, so the dog likes to eat the food, and they leave him or her satisfied and not constantly scrounging for more. Feeding 3-4 smaller meals per day instead of

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Fat
Carbohydrates
Fiber
Vitamins
Minerals
Essential Fatty Acids
Probiotics

only one or two larger ones can also help.

Some dogs are true "food hounds" who may still be restless until their body has adjusted. A great way of distracting them is to provide mental stimulation (walks, puzzle toys) or appropriate recreational bones (raw only, never heat treated in any way!), such as beef knuckle bones. Trim all visible fat though, and scoop out as much of the marrow as you can.



Sabine Contreras, Canine Care and Nutrition Consultant, offers [personalized feeding plans](#) for dogs of all sizes, breeds and ages, no matter if they are companions, performance, working or show dogs.

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