



Fat Cats Getting Fatter — What Owners Can Do About It

Cat illnesses and insurance claims rise along with weight, but intervention can improve your cat's health. Read on for cat weight-loss tips!

By Kristina Lotz

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[Fat cats](#) face the same types of problems that overweight people do but, unlike a person, cats can't get thin on their own. They need us to step in and help them lose the extra weight.

New information from the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) show that a whopping 55% of household [cats are overweight](#) or obese. To put this in perspective, APOP tells us that "a 15-pound domestic shorthaired cat is comparable to a 5'4" human female weighing 218 pounds or a 5'9" male that weighs 254 pounds."

How "big" is the problem, and what can cat owners do about it?

The Statistics

According to APOP founder Dr. Ernie Ward, "15% of cat owners characterized their pet as normal weight when it was actually overweight or obese." This means some owners of fat cats don't even think of feeding their cats less or exercising them more. As with anything else, admitting your cat has a problem is the first step.

Dr. Cindy Houlihan, owner of The Cat Practice in Birmingham, Mich., has seen a 40% increase of [obesity in cats](#) over 5 years and a corresponding increase in chronic conditions including feline diabetes, heart disease and arthritis, as well as recurring illnesses such as asthma. She's also seen more cats who can't groom themselves properly, leading to an increase in urine scalding and urinary tract infections.

In 2011, VPI Pet Insurance had more than 4,500 claims, costing more than \$920,000, related to health risks that can be caused by obesity, including osteoarthritis, soft tissue trauma, diabetes, hepatitis (including Feline Hepatic Lipidosis) and gall bladder disorders.

Petplan, another pet insurance company, saw significant increases in cat obesity-related claims in 2011. Arthritis claims increased by 438%, diabetes by 253%, and cardiac disease by 32%. These claims resulted in large pet bills, starting at \$900 and topping out at \$9,600. The highest per-incident and per-policy claims were related arthritis.

The bottom line? A fat cat will not live as long and will cost you more vet visits than a healthy weight cat.

The Health Risks

These statistics show that some key cat health risks to feline obesity are osteoarthritis, soft tissue trauma, diabetes, hepatitis (including Feline Hepatic Lipidosis), gall bladder disorders, arthritis and, of course, heart disease.

As mentioned, your cat needs your help. In fact, Houlihan cautions, "if you have an overweight cat that begins to lose weight on his or her own, see your veterinarian immediately. Unexplained weight loss in a cat should always be investigated as this could be a sign of serious illness." Any size cat losing weight unexpectedly should be cause for concern, she adds.



For more information, and to see if your cat passes the fit test, read this [fat cat infographic](#).

Extra weight is killer on yours [cat's](#) joints and skeletal structure. Your cat is made for hunting, crouching and pouncing, meaning his body is constructed for speed and litheness, not for carrying around several extra pounds.

The Diet Plan

Your cat's veterinarian holds the key to a successful weight loss plan. They know your cat and his health problems and can make sure you are treating his problems correctly.

At Cat Practice, Houlihan has a five-point "trim the fat" plan that includes:

- 1. Choosing the right foods.** Foods high in protein and low in carbs are the best choice for any cat. Canned foods also make your cat feel fuller due to greater moisture content than dry foods. For some overweight felines, prescription foods may also work.
- 2. Portion control.** If you live in a multicat home, put food available to other cats out of reach for the dieter. Consider hiding food around the house so your cat has to "hunt" for his/her meals, or place food in "treat balls" that require the cat to actively get food out of the toy.
- 3. Exercise and activity.** Planned play time is essential for not only weight control, but muscle and bone health.
- 4. Mental stimulation.** Just like people, cats eat when bored. Provide vertical space (cat trees for example) hide-and seek tunnels and other environmental enrichment.
- 5. Avoid making food a reward.** Replace treats with catnip, cat-nip bubbles, affection, verbal praise, playtime and whatever your kitty enjoys.

These points are a great way to jump start your cat's weight loss plan with your veterinarian. They also have a five-point test "[Me-Yow Tube](#)" video.

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention also has a [cat weight checklist](#) on their site along with facts, tips and other useful information to help you help your cat lose weight.

Original link: <http://www.catchannel.com/top-cat-tips/data-on-overweight-cats-obese-cats.aspx>