

# PORKY PETS: IT'S A GROWING PROBLEM

By Jane E. Brody  
New York Times News Service

Humans are not the only residents of the United States who are getting fatter every year. So, unsurprisingly, are our furry friends — the dogs and cats that share, too often, our tendency to overeat.

Unlike their owners, however, the family dog or cat cannot open the refrigerator or gain access to snacks in high cupboards without human assistance, which means the responsibility for pet obesity rests with you-know-who.

Veterinarians report nearly half the dogs they see are overweight or obese, although only 17 percent of owners acknowledge that their pets are fat.

“Others know their pet is overweight but don’t think it’s a problem,” said Deborah Linder, who heads the Tufts Obesity Clinic for Animals Clinical Nutrition Service. “Wrong!”

According to Nationwide, the country’s largest provider of pet health insurance, obesity among dogs and cats has risen for eight years in a row, along with claims for ailments related to being overweight.

In 2017, obesity-related insurance claims for veterinary expenses exceeded \$69 million, a 24 percent increase over the last eight years, Nationwide reported in January.

With only 2 percent of pets covered by insurance, the costs to owners of overweight pets is likely to be in the billions.

Dollars aside, the toll taken by excess weight on the animals’ health, quality of life and longevity is far greater than most owners probably realize.

Common obesity-related ailments in dogs and cats include arthritis, heart disease, bladder and urinary tract disease, chronic kidney disease, liver disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and spinal disease.

A study of Labrador retrievers, a breed especially prone to becoming overweight, revealed that excess weight can take nearly two years off a pet’s life.

So if you love your pets even half as much as I love mine, you should be willing to keep them lean or, if they are already too chubby, take the



Lolita, an overweight dachshund, works out on a treadmill as part of her “canine cardio session,” a health and fitness package offered at the Morris Animal Inn in New Jersey.

Tony Cenicola/ NewYorkTimes News Service

steps veterinarians recommend to help them trim down.

A study of 50 obese dogs enrolled in a weight-loss program at the University of Liverpool demonstrated the value of losing excess body fat.

The 30 animals in the study that reached their target weight had greater vitality, less pain and fewer emotional issues than the animals that remained too fat.

As with people, prevention is the better route.

One way to keep pets from gaining too much weight is to weigh them periodically.

My Havanese gets on the scale at every vet visit, routine or otherwise. If he gains more than half a pound, I cut back a little on his meals and treats.

Linder emphasized that treats should make up no more than 10 percent of a dog’s daily calories.

“We love our pets and want to give them treats, but we often don’t think about treats from a caloric standpoint,” said John Loftus, veterinarian at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. “It adds up over time. Better to show our love in ways other than food.”

Linder told me “everything counts as a treat, including marrow bones and rawhide,” as well as scraps of human food offered by owners or scarfed off their plates.

Treats used for training or retrieval should contain only a few calories each, like Fruitables Skinny Minis or

Zuke’s Mini Naturals.

Rather than overdoing treats, give your dog love and attention by playing ball, fetch or tug-of-war, which provides some exercise that burns calories.

Cats, too, love to play with things they can wrestle with, like a toy mouse on a string or a ball of yarn. For pets that are too old or unwilling to play, you can show your love with a calorie-free caress, belly rub or scratch behind the ears.

Whether you feed your dog once, twice or even four times a day, the amount of food dished out should always be measured.

Many owners are guided by serving sizes listed on pet food labels, but these are just general guidelines that tend to err on the high side, Loftus said.

Not all animals are metabolically alike or equally active. Best to judge quantity by whether your pet is gaining or losing weight on the amount of food you provide, he said.

“Guides should say, ‘Please feed at the lower end of the feeding recommendations when starting our food, and increase only if the animal is losing weight,’” said Joseph Wakshlag, who works with Loftus at Cornell.

As to whether to feed dry kibble, wet canned food or a combination, Loftus said, “The jury is still out as to what’s better.”

Wakshlag added: “The calories make a difference, not the

food. You can feed very little of a high-calorie food and get weight loss if you are diligent. In general, canned foods designed for weight loss tend to provide fewer calories than dry food alternatives.”

Equally important is to learn to resist when pets beg for more food than they need.

“If you’re already meeting your pets’ nutritional needs, they’re not hungry. What they’re really asking for is your attention. Better to distract them with an activity,” Loftus said.

Cats can be even more challenging than dogs. They tend to graze, prompting owners to leave food out for them all the time.

This becomes a problem. “I’ve never met an animal that could free-feed and still lose weight,” Linder said.

For cats that come begging for food at 4:30 a.m., she suggests using an automatic timed feeder. Cats quickly learn when the food will drop down and will wait at the feeder instead of nudging their owners, she said.

Of course, regular physical activity — 15 to 30 minutes a day — is important for a dog’s overall well-being, but it’s rarely enough to help an overweight dog lose weight “unless they’re running a 5K every day,” Linder said. “They’re not going to burn off the calories in a marrow bone with a walk around the block.”

The ideal weight-loss goal is about 1 percent to 2 percent of the pet’s weight each week.

# Study: Teens worried about depression

By Karen Zraick  
New York Times News Service

Most American teenagers — across demographic groups — see depression and anxiety as major problems among their peers, a new survey by the Pew Research Center found.

The survey found that 70 percent of teenagers saw mental health as a big issue.

Fewer teenagers cited bullying, drug addiction or gangs as major problems; those from low-income households were more likely to do so.

The consistency of the responses about mental health issues across gender, race and income lines was striking, said Juliana Horowitz, an associate director of research at the center.

The survey also asked respondents if they considered alcohol consumption or teen pregnancy to be major problems among their peers.

Half of the teenagers from households earning less than \$30,000 said alcohol was a major problem; that number decreased to 43 percent among teenagers in households earning more than \$75,000.

Teenagers diverged most drastically across income lines on the issue of teen pregnancy.

Fifty-five percent of teenagers in lower-income households said it was a major problem among their peers. Just 22 percent of teenagers in wealthier households agreed.

The survey of 920 teenagers ages 13-17 in the United States was conducted online and by phone in the fall.

In their report, the researchers broke down results by income level and gender but not race or ethnicity, citing the small sample size.

Some psychologists have tied a growth in mental health issues among teenagers to increased social media use, academic pressure and frightening events like terror attacks and school shootings.

# Report finds sepsis common cause of death in hospitals

The New York Times

Sepsis, a life-threatening response to infection, is a common cause of deaths in hospitals, according to a new report.

The study looked at 568 people who had died in hospitals and whose average age was 70. More than half had sepsis, and it was the immediate cause of death for nearly 200 of them; another 100 had sepsis but did not die of it.

Only 36 of the sepsis deaths might have been prevented with earlier antibiotic treatment or other measures, the researchers determined.

Dr. Chanu Rhee, an infectious disease and critical care physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the study’s lead author, said that many hospital patients with sepsis are elderly, frail, suffering from multiple underlying diseases and often terminally ill, and they do not survive even when provided with timely and appropriate care.

“Any preventable death from sepsis is a tragedy,” Rhee said, “but there is a perception that all sepsis deaths are preventable, and this study challenges that perception.” The study was published in JAMA Network Open.

One million to 3 million Americans are found to have sepsis each year, and 15 percent to 30 percent of them will die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

# Packing a healthier lunch, starting with the sandwich

Mayo Clinic News Network

Packing a healthy lunch seems like an easy task, but sometimes all the sandwich choices may seem daunting.

Many deli, or processed meats, are packed with preservatives, nitrates and sodium that could raise your risk of heart disease and other health issues.

So is there a better choice to build a lunch you’ll love and feel good about?

Katherine Zeratsky, a Mayo Clinic registered dietitian nutritionist, says what you pack with your lunch may help balance what you pack in your sandwich.

The sandwich. Convenient

and delicious, but not all fillings are the same, especially when it comes to deli meats.

“If it’s gone through a grinder, and had sugar and salt and other things added, it’s now been more highly processed.”

But what about your favorite rotisserie chicken? Zeratsky says it’s a step in the right direction, but it will have added sodium.

“Most chicken products do because they are leaner, and, so, they’re adding a little salt in there to hold the moisture.” Zeratsky says knowing that, you can still create a healthy lunch.

“Complement that with other nutritious foods, like

fruits and vegetables. That way, you’re getting some added potassium.”

A sandwich and a banana. Seems like a good match, but why?

“Potassium, on the flip side from sodium, you have two nutrients that can work for and against your blood pressure. And, so, you’re just creating a better balance overall.”

Be sure to use a whole-grain bread to get your fiber, and consider an avocado, tomato or sprouts for added health benefits.

For more sandwich options, visit the Mayo Clinic website for recipes.



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