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**New Study Sounds the Alarm on Pet Obesity**

***British Journal of Nutrition* Warns More Than Half of Pets Overweight**

*Good News: Helping Pets Lose Weight Helps People Lose Weight!*

An article in the *British Journal of Nutrition* reports that more than half of the pets in the U.S. and the E.U. are overweight or obese. Using food to train and treat companion animals is causing a wide variety of diseases, ruining pet quality of life, and dramatically shortening companion animal lifespans.

The doctors who authored the article are a pediatrician specializing in childhood obesity, [Robert A. Pretlow, MD](http://childhoodobesitynews.com/about-childhood-obesity-news/about-dr-pretlow/), from Seattle, Washington, and a veterinarian from Utrecht in the Netherlands, [R.J. Corbee, DVM](http://ebvs.eu/colleges/ECVCN/members/dr-ronald-jan-corbee). Their findings appear in an article entitled "Similarities Between Obesity in Pets and Children" in the [*British Journal of Nutrition*](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/similarities-between-obesity-in-pets-and-children-the-addiction-model/D957AE30A2C9E4109C42EF991C4D9FEF/core-reader) (BJN).

**Obesity is Hurting Companion Animal Quality of Life**

"Half of companion animals are overweight or obese," the authors state, explaining that our affection for pets is killing them. "Pets are like children to many pet owners," the authors note. "Similar to human parents, 'pet-parents' give treats/extra food to their pets to garner perceived love and positive interactions."

Obesity is the biggest health threat faced by pets. It can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer and premature death. It also reduces a pet's pleasure in life, making it more difficult to walk, run, jump and play.

"Stress in animals can cause overeating and obesity," the author's note, and cite stress-inducing environmental factors such as being confined for large portions of the day. Overeating may become a food addiction for the pet and an affection addiction for the pet parent, who uses food as a way to engineer positive pet interactions.

**Five Warning Signs of a Pet Obesity Problem**

Here are five of the top warning signs that you may be creating a weight problem for your pets:

1. Do you use food treats to reward your pet(s)?
2. Do you leave pet food dishes full all day?
3. Does your pet get a snack whenever you indulge?
4. Do your pets wake you up in the night to feed them?
5. Do you make excuses for your pet's weight?

Once a pattern of associating food with both stress and affection becomes ingrained, it impacts the animal brain exactly like an addiction. "When significant brain changes take place, [both] children and pets are unable to stop comfort eating, and it becomes an addictive process," the BJN article notes.

**Cravings and Begging End in About 10 Days**

It may seem like an impossible task to wean pets off addictive treats, but it's not. "If a specific treat/food can be totally abstained from or amounts reduced to a new level for at least 10 days in a row, the pet's behaviour will change, and cravings and begging should cease," the authors report, adding "perseverance by the pet-parent is key."

The authors recommend gradual withdraw from addictive pet treats and overly-large or frequent meals. The goal is ***two discrete meals a day*** with no food or treats in-between. The good news is that helping your pets stay healthy and shapely will help you impose similar restraints on yourself and other family members. The most effective weight loss programs involve family participation.

**Three Steps to Healthier Pets**

1. **The first step** is to restrict, and then eliminate, the single worst problem food. Be prepared to go through a rough patch. The frustrated pet might take it out on nearby humans, who are seen, for the moment, as betrayers. The process of withdrawing from that substance takes about ten days. If there are two parents, they need to work together to support each other's efforts.
2. **Repeat the process** and knock down the next problem food, such as table scraps. Allow time, and be patient, while the pet adjusts to the change. Yes, restricting food is difficult when a pet is hooked on unhealthful foods or a pet-parent is hooked on purchased affection. Both of you will experience withdrawal symptoms, but they will pass.
3. When the available food is limited to only healthful choices, then it's time for the next stage -- a permanent **ban on all between-meal eating**. Emotional blackmail is a potent response, whereby pets retaliate by withholding affection. A more honest and genuine relationship with a healthy and happy pet will follow.

We can keep our pets healthy, and guarantee that they will be with us for a long time, by keeping their weight from getting out of control and not using food treats as bribes or rewards. And don't forget the side benefits - saving money on grocery bills and, more important, on vet bills.

**For More Information on Obesity Solutions**

[**Robert A. Pretlow, MD, MSEE, FAAP,**](http://childhoodobesitynews.com/about-childhood-obesity-news/about-dr-pretlow/) is a pediatrician and electronic engineer. He is the director of [**Weigh2Rock**](http://weigh2rock.com/), an online weight loss system for teens and preteens, and creator of the **[W8Loss2Go](http://w8loss2go.com/)** smartphone app for losing weight without surgery or drugs.For more information, contact Dr. Pretlow via email at director@weigh2rock.com or by phone at eHealth International, (206) 448-4414.

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