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Cat Focus Month Three - Feeding

Previously, we outlined the importance of once-per-year cat exams as well as twice-per-year exams for senior cats over 7 years old. These exams are vital to maintaining cat health year round. In our first cat-focused article in this series, we discussed the importance of yearly bloodwork for all cats. This month, we will be talking about obesity in cats.

Natural Eating
Obesity is the number one diagnosed medical condition in cats with over 54% of felines being overweight. In a natural setting, a cat would hunt prey of rodents, birds and small mammals. They would eat fresh prey 8-10 times per day. Cats prefer warm food and eat prey immediately. An average mouse is about 30 Calories, so 8-10 mice would achieve an active cat's daily nutrition need of 250-300 calories per day. When eating prey, cats eat the meat as well as the organs and intestines, which include grasses and grains. On contrast, the typical house cat is fed and ingests too many calories for their activity level. Overfeeding cats and not watching Calories is the number one cause of cat obesity.

Is my Cat Overweight?

At your cat's annual wellness visit to your veterinarian, your cat will have a body condition score performed. This is done by feeling over the pet's ribs, checking the abdomen and evaluating its overall condition. There are two scales, which include a 1-10 scale with 5 being ideal and a 1-5 scale with 3 being ideal. The definition of an ideal weight cat is a well-proportioned cat, which includes its waist being behind the ribs. In addition, the ribs should be palpable with slight fat covering and the abdominal fat pad should be minimal.

Maintaining a Healthy Weight
Most people are very aware of the affects obesity has on the body including, early arthritis, diabetes and shortening the pet's overall lifespan by two years or more.

Here are some tips to maintain a healthy cat weight:

1. Make an appointment with your veterinarian to evaluate your cat's body condition score. Your veterinarian should tell you what your pet's ideal weight is and the Calories to feed your pet to reach it. It is a good idea to also plan follow up visits in 2-3 months to check weight loss and adjust your pet's calorie needs. As an example, an overweight cat with a goal weight of 10 lbs can be fed 174 Calories per day for weight loss.
2. Now that you know how many calories your cat needs, we need to choose a food that is best for your cat for weight loss. For pets that are a body condition score 7, 8 or 9 (very obese), a veterinary prescription diet is needed for safe weight loss. Once your pet gets to a healthier weight, they can be changed to a weight management diet. Most foods that you can purchase at pet stores are not designed for serious weight loss, and can result in lack of important vitamins, minerals and protein.
3. The more pets you have the trickier it is during feeding time. To achieve weight loss, your pet must be fed separately to control how much food they eat. This can be done by feeding them in a room and shutting the door, and picking the food up when they are finished. There are a lot of creative ideas to make sure pets eat separately.
4. Cats prefer to eat small meals 8-10 times per day. Unfortunately, most people's schedules do not allow this. Divide your cat's daily needs into as many feedings as you are able to feed.
5. Your veterinarian is there to help you through the weight loss process. One comment we hear frequently is that the cat is "meowing when they are hungry." There are many things we can do to help

minimize this behavior. One example is to use a food ball where small amounts of food fall out as the pet is playing with it.

Online resources:

www.petobesityprevention.com