Helping Your Dog Reach a Healthy Weight: A Simple Guide to Calorie Control

Helping your dog lose weight is one of the very best things you can do to give them a longer, happier, and more active life. Even losing just a few pounds can take huge amounts of pressure off their joints, boost their energy, and prevent serious health problems. The good news? You do not need a complicated workout routine to make it happen. You just need a simple plan and a little consistency!

The Golden Rule: 80% Diet, 20% Exercise

When it comes to shedding extra pounds, **controlling calories is the #1 key to success**. While daily walks and playtime are great for your dog's heart and happiness, exercise only accounts for about **20%** of the weight loss journey. The other **80%** comes straight from the food bowl.

Think of it this way: it takes a lot of walking to burn off just one extra dog biscuit. That means we have to take an honest, close look at every single thing going into your dog’s mouth each day.

Step 1: Get the Whole Household on Board

Before we look at food labels, have a quick family meeting. To help your dog succeed, you need to know *everything* they are eating—and who is feeding it to them.

- **No More Table Scraps:** Sharing bites of your dinner or random human snacks adds up fast. Because dogs are much smaller than we are, a small piece of cheese or crust of bread to you is like an entire extra meal to them. If you are serious about weight loss, table scraps have to stop.
- **Try the Treat Jar Trick:** Put your dog’s daily allowance of treats into one specific jar or container each morning. Let everyone in the house know that all treats must come from that jar. Once the jar is empty, treats are done for the day!
- **Ditch the "All-Day Buffet":** A very common myth is that dogs will only eat as much as they need if you leave food out all day. In reality, very few dogs can self-regulate. Free-feeding almost always leads to overeating. Unless your dog is already at an ideal weight, scheduled, measured meals are a must.

Step 2: Do the Calorie Math

To help your dog lose weight safely, we calculate the daily calories needed for their **ideal weight** (what they *should* weigh, not what they weigh right now) and trim that number back by 20%—meaning we feed 80% of that maintenance amount. Our veterinary team is always happy to calculate this for you, or you can follow this easy formula at home:

Step	Formula	Example: A 40-lb Ideal Weight Dog

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1. Convert Pounds to Kilograms	Ideal Weight (lbs) ÷ 2.2 = Weight in kg	40 lbs ÷ 2.2 = **18.2 kg**
2. Find Base Daily Calories	(Weight in kg × 30) + 70 = Base Calories	(18.2 × 30) + 70 = 546 + 70 = **616 calories**
3. Adjust for Weight Loss	Base Calories × 0.80 = Daily Weight Loss Target	616 × 0.80 = **493 calories per day**

Step 3: Count Every Calorie and Measure Meals

Simply switching to a "light," "low-fat," or "weight management" dog food will not automatically make your dog lose weight. Those diets can be helpful tools, but **total daily calories are what truly matter**—no matter what kind of food is in the bag.

1. **Check the Food Bag:** Look at the nutrition label on your dog's food to find the exact number of calories (often listed as *kcal*) per cup or per can.
2. **Use a Real Measuring Cup:** Ditch the coffee mug or big scoop. Use an actual kitchen measuring cup (or a kitchen scale) so you know you are feeding the exact portion your dog needs.
3. **Count Treats and Toppers:** Everything counts toward your daily total! Check the calorie count on your dog's treats. If you give healthy snacks like fruits or veggies, or if you top their kibble with boiled or baked chicken, include those calories in the daily budget. *(Tip: If your dog isn't losing weight later on, cutting back on these extras is the easiest first adjustment to make.)*

Step 4: Weigh In and Adjust Monthly

Weight loss is a steady journey, not an overnight race. Plan to weigh your dog **at least once a month** (you are always welcome to swing by our clinic for a quick, free weight check on our scale!).

- **If the scale is going down:** Awesome job! Keep doing exactly what you are doing—no need to change their food amount.
- **If the scale isn't budging:** Don't get discouraged! Every dog's metabolism is a little different. If they aren't losing weight after a month, we will simply trim their daily calories down a bit more or remove extra food toppers until we see steady progress.

You've got this! Reach out to our veterinary team anytime if you need help checking your math, finding the calories in your dog's food, or setting an ideal target weight.