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### **Obesity and Pets**

As the holiday season approaches with family gatherings and festivities, many of us are well aware of that extra slice of pumpkin pie or glass of egg nogg we consume and what it can do to our waistlines in the weeks to follow. As important as it is to watch our own weight, it is just as important to monitor the body condition of our pets. Obesity is a common health problem affecting our dogs and cats today. Not only can it predispose our animals to diseases, it can have a major impact on their joints as well.

How can you tell if your pet is overweight? When you feel along the side of your dog or cat, you should easily be able to feel their ribs, with a small layer of cushioning between the bone and the skin. You should also be able to see a waistline when looking at them from above. If you are concerned that your pet may be packing a few extra pounds, your veterinarian will be able to assess their weight during an annual exam.

If your pet is at risk, there are some things that can be done at home to safely help them maintain their weight in an appropriate, healthy range. If you free-feed your pet, switch to measured meals based on your pet's weight range. This meal size can be found on the back of most pet food labels or can be calculated by your veterinarian. This action will restrict the amount of calories he or she consumes in a day. Extra calories from dog treats and feline "Pounce" treats should also be accounted for. In place of special treats, a small portion of your furry friend's food can be removed from the allotted serving. This is an easy way to ensure that they stay in a specific caloric range.

If restricting your pet's current food proves challenging, there are also prescription diets available at veterinary clinics. These diets include a higher proportion of fiber in place of calories, allowing your pet to eat their regular serving while consuming fewer excessive caloric units. It is also important to have your pet examined annually to make sure there is not an underlying disease process that may be contributing to weight problems.

Exercise with your pets. A twenty-minute walk, once a day, is great for your dog and can improve your health as well. Throwing a tennis ball, frisbee or other beloved toy is also a great way to get your pooch moving.

For the indoor cat owner, feather wands or other hand held interactive cat toys offer mental stimulation and provide those sedentary felines with much needed exercise. Draping a sheet over two chairs to make a kitty fort or placing paper bags around a room can encourage cats to play. A bouncy ball in the bathtub may entice them out of a nap. Investing in a cat tree or other feline furniture can allow them to climb and work their muscles as well as decrease the hair on your own couch!

Wishing you and your animal loved ones a safe and festive holiday season.