

Top ten tips for weight loss in dogs

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1. Keep to a schedule with meals and weigh out the food. If you are measuring the dry food by hand or with a scoop the amount can vary significantly each day. Even different dry and wet foods can vary greatly in calorie content. Work out what your dog needs for their ideal weight and make sure they are not getting any more than this, weighing each day or on a weekly basis, helps to build consistency.



2. Cut down the calories – two ways

- a. Reduce the amount by 10% per week until weight loss is seen
- b. Choose a diet with higher protein, lower fat and higher fibre – together these changes are designed to promote weight loss, while maintaining muscle mass, and keep your dog full.

3. Walk off the weight – try to walk your dog two times, every day for at least 30 mins. Try to maintain a good pace for a good section of the walks. Intersperse time for 'sniffari' time and gentle play / or training to keep your dog engaged.



4. Pick a healthy snack – many treats are marketed as ‘daily’ rewards – dental chews, joint support, healthy skin etc. The calorie content of these is often MUCH higher than complete dog food. If your dog is on a diet, swap shop bought treats for crunchy vegetables and experiment with what your dog likes – carrot, courgette, green beans can all be used. Some fruit is also safe to eat, and although slightly higher in calories than veg, it will be a great alternative to very rich raw hide, or commercial treats.



5. Compare food labels – Dog Food Marketing is designed to persuade you to buy. Even if it says ‘healthy weight’ there is no guarantee that it will help your dog. The more expensive the food, generally the better quality ingredients it has. Look for high protein, low fat (less than 10-12% DM content) and possibly high fibre. Ask questions of the label claims:

- a. ‘LOW CALORIE’ - compared to what?
- b. ‘LOW FAT’ Is it less than 10-12% Dry Matter (DM) content?
- c. ‘LIGHT’ Compare to the standard offer

6. Caution with the portion size – as above it's important to know you are feeding the same amount each day and can make changes if results are not happening. Bowl size can make a difference here. Human studies have shown that people eat LESS from a small plate, compared to a LARGE plate, even when unlimited access to a buffet is given. How big is your dog's bowl?

7. Get more active at home. Use TV commercials to play a game with your dog for a few minutes. When you come home, go out into the garden to play tug while the kettle boils. Enrichment toys, and interaction with hide and seek games will strengthen your bond and make movement a part of your life.

8. Think about the number and size of titbits, or extras that you feed. Can these be reduced in size? Your dog likes to be rewarded but will prefer many small treats, over one large one. Can you swap some food rewards for play/tug/chase rewards? Clicker training can also be used to replace food rewards.



9. Focus on the food. Make mealtimes longer by inventing new games with enrichment toys for your dog. Kibble can be fed in a cardboard box sprinkled onto crumpled up paper for supervised mealtimes. If Kongs do not slow down your fast eater, they can be frozen, so they last longer.

10. Pick up the bowl altogether. One meal a week, take away your dogs food bowl and only feed them from your hand. This will make them more focused on you, allow for food to be distributed on walks and throughout the day and mean you will interact far more than usual.

