

Letters & Notices



SMALL ANIMAL HEALTH



Dangerous trends in pet obesity

OBESITY is a condition in which an excess body fat has developed to the point that health is adversely affected.¹ Dogs that are overweight have a shortened life span,² their quality of life is adversely affected,³ and they are predisposed to other conditions including osteoarthritis, diabetes mellitus and certain types of neoplasia.⁴

At a recent World Small Animal Veterinary Association One Health meeting, canine obesity was officially classified as a disease, which is consistent with its classification in people.⁵

The last study to report obesity prevalence in pet dogs in the UK was published in 2010. The study found 59 per cent of dogs were classified as overweight or obese.⁶

Between June 2016 and October 2017, dog owners attending seven different family pet shows in five UK locations (Berkshire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire, Kent and Manchester) consented to their dog having a body condition score assessment by a team of experienced veterinary nurses. Data from 1100 adult (≥ 24 months) and 516 juvenile (< 24 months) dogs were available for analysis. In adult dogs, 715 (65 per cent) were overweight (body condition score of 6/9 to 9/9) and 99 (9 per cent) were obese (body condition score of 8/9 or 9/9). Most concerning was the prevalence of obesity in the juvenile dogs examined, where 190 (37 per cent) and 16 (3 per cent) were classified as overweight and obese, respectively. Further, the prevalence increased steadily during the growth phase, from 21 per cent (21/100) in dogs younger than six months of age to 52 per cent (16/31) in dogs 18 to 24 months of age.

To date, the veterinary profession has not taken the problem of obesity seriously enough. For example,

veterinary surgeons infrequently record weight and body condition during veterinary consultations,⁷ and rarely record the fact that a dog is overweight or obese in their clinical notes.⁸ In our opinion, veterinary professionals can help to reverse the current trend by focusing on prevention, while continuing to dedicate their time to successfully managing obesity when already developed.⁹

Proactive monitoring of body weight and body condition throughout life would be fundamental to any such preventive plan.¹⁰ Given the prevalence of being overweight in growing dogs, body weight monitoring should start at initial vaccinations and continue throughout the early life phase. Such an approach is facilitated by the availability of evidence-based growth charts, for example, those recently produced for dogs weighing up to 40 kg,¹¹ and freely available for use by veterinary professionals at www.waltham.com/resources/puppy-growth-charts.

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