

# NATURAL PET<sup>®</sup> Care



## What are the steps of a successful weight loss program?

*Like humans, overweight or obese dogs can be at risk of developing some serious health problems. Overweight or obese dogs do not generally live as long as dogs that are fitter and maintain normal weight. In addition to being at a greater risk for heart disease, overweight dogs show greater incidence of arthritis, breathing problems, pancreatic disorders, liver diseases and many more.*

*Obesity is simply the result of too much energy (calories) intake in the form of food, compared with the amount of energy expended by the animal. Most importantly, we know that dogs do not feed themselves. Most often, the root cause of a pet's weight gain lies with the pet's owner and there too lies the approach to a successful weight loss program.*

### Successful weight loss program

*The owner's motivation is essential to the success of a weight loss program. A successful weight loss program for dogs is multi-dimensional and should consist of the following:*

#### **Step 1: Veterinarian Examination**

*It is important that any dog with weight problem should be examined by a veterinarian as certain medical conditions can cause obesity in dogs. The veterinarian will determine if there is an underlying cause for the obesity or if there are other medical conditions present, which*



could complicate weight reduction. Because diseases such as hypothyroidism and diabetes mellitus can be associated with obesity and should be checked for these diseases prior to the weight loss program.

### **Step 2: Household Cooperation**

One of the main reasons weight loss program for dogs fail is that one (or more) member(s) in the family or even the neighbours, is not following the weight loss plan. Everyone must agree that the program is essential for the life and health of the dog. Each must follow the recommendations regarding diet, treats, exercise, etc., if the program is to be successful and the dog achieves its ideal weight again. Please remember that the most obese pets are made, not born, that way. Many pet's owners give their pets treats and snacks and feed them whenever the pet begs for food. In essence, these owners are setting their pets up for all of the health risks that can occur with overweight.

### **Step 3: Diet Change**

Most weight loss program for dogs recommend estimating the dog's ideal weight and calculating the calories your dog needs based on the dog's Resting Energy Requirements (RER). The RER is the basic amount of energy that a dog would use in a day while remaining at rest. There is extreme variability (up to 20%) in the actual RER of dogs weighing the same, since their activity level can vary greatly. There are huge differences between breeds, size, growth rates in puppies, daily activity levels, skin and coat thickness and living conditions. For this reason, you should never put your dog on a diet without the assistance of your veterinarian and it is important that you follow the weight loss diet recommended by your veterinarian.

There are two basic ways to cut down on calories. One is to reduce the amount of food the dog is currently eating. The second is to switch to a special weight reduction diet. And of course, feeding with either way, table scraps are not allowed and treats shall be kept to minimal.

### **Step 4: Exercise Plan**

Exercise programs will need to be tailored to the dog taking into account the existing condition of the dog's muscles and joints, heart, and respiratory system. It is important to choose physical activities suitable for your dog and do not overdo. Start slowly and work up to higher activity levels. Rest if you notice signs of fatigue, like heavy panting. In general, leash walking for 30 to 60 minutes a day, five times a week would be a great way to start. The exercise time may vary according to your dog's size, age and health conditions. If your dog is quite obese, exercise should be introduced gradually. Too much activity can be dangerous to a very obese dog. Other suitable exercise program for dogs include swimming, hydrotherapy and treadmills. Swimming is an

excellent choice for obese dogs with arthritis as it places less stress on the joints.

### **Step 5: Intake of Essential Nutrients**

When reducing the amount of your dog's regular food intake, it also means your dog is receiving fewer nutrients. Therefore, you may need to provide supplement to ensure that he gets all the essential vitamins and minerals and it is something you should be aware of. The increase of exercise may also produce a greater demand for essential nutrients. Supplementation ensures that deficiency states do not arise.

### **Step 6: Weight Loss Supplements**

Overweight or obese dogs have a slow metabolism and they simply do not burn off those calories very fast. Your dog needs to burn more calories than he eats. By taking weight loss supplement, the dog will start burning his fat deposits to generate energy required and also has an increased metabolic rate to convert excess carbohydrate for daily activity. When a weight loss supplement is added to the weight loss program, your dogs will have faster weight reduction than those dogs who were just on a weight loss program alone.

### **Step 7: Monitor Progress**

Constant monitoring is the single most important component of the weight loss program. It is a good idea to weigh your dog weekly on the same scale and keep a written record of food intake (including all treats) and exercise on a weekly basis. It is sometimes helpful to record this information (dates and weights) on your dog's weight loss progress so that the dog's response to the program can be monitored and adjustments made if necessary. At some stages, you may notice that your dog's weight reach a 'plateau' in which your dog seems stuck at a certain weight. This is common and it is vital that you continue with the weight loss program.

### **Step 8: Weight Maintenance**

When you and your dog achieved the target weight, congratulate yourself and your dog. You will be amazed at how much younger and livelier your dog has become once he lost the excess weight. After that, it is important that you remain focus and continue to maintain the ideal weight. To be sure that your dog does not regain it, continue weighing your dog as you gradually increase food intake. You can either feed more of the weight reduction diet or change to a diet that is less restrictive. Do not start feeding free choice (the bowl of food is always there). If weight is regained consistently for 2 weeks, or more than 3% of weight is regained in one week, go back on the diet program.

The good news is that there is a lot you can do to help your dog to lose weight and help your dog live a longer, healthier and more enjoyable life.