

Get *moving* with your pet

Weight management is serious business, but it can also be fun for pets and owners alike.

Data collected in 2014 by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) found 58 percent of U.S. cats and 53 percent of dogs were overweight. Excess weight in pets—as with humans—can lead to poor health, including type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure and many forms of cancer.

The data also found that nearly all cat and dog owners incorrectly identified their pets as a normal weight. Excess weight and even obesity is sometimes difficult to see—and it's sometimes even more difficult to accept when a veterinarian suggests that a pet needs to lose weight. However, Ernie Ward, DVM, APOP's founder, says weight management is far preferable to medical treatment—and it's less expensive.

He encourages all pet owners to talk to their veterinarian about their pet's weight and nutritional needs before excess weight causes illness. So, here's great advice on how to get moving with your pet and make it part of your routine. Be your pet's workout buddy and enjoy the time together as you both improve your health.

Get your pets moving

> Use toys to engage your cat's predatory personality. Participate in two or three active five-minute play times a day.

Ward says indoor cats that are not engaged can develop behavior problems that can lead to overeating. "Engage them physically and emotionally to be healthier and happier," he says.

> Play catch, Frisbee or agility games with your dog, or go swimming, jogging or hiking. Dogs—and people—should get 30 minutes of exercise a day, which can be divided into two to three periods if needed.

> Work out in intervals or in "speed play." Jog or run from one streetlight or block to the next, then walk for one. It's a great way to ramp up metabolism and im-



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—Dr. Ernie Ward

prove fitness," Ward says. He says to look for hills or even stairs. For a more low-impact surface, try soft grass or trails.

> Don't get bored. "Reverse your normal walking route or walk on the opposite side of road," Ward says. "Set up a simple obstacle course in your backyard with boxes, poles, etc., to engage the mental and physical needs of dogs." You can even set up a mini-agility course in the house during bad weather or with small dogs.

Make nutrition a priority

> Treats: Don't undo exercise efforts by adding unnecessary calories to your pet's diet. Instead, try food puzzles filled with your pet's daily serving of food. Ward addresses this in his book *Chow Hounds*, calling it the "Break 10 Reward Rule."

"We sabotage our good efforts by over-rewarding after exercise," Ward says. "We think we—they—earned an extra portion, so no weight loss."

> Measure: Break the habit of the "all day buffet." Follow feeding recommendations by using a measuring cup.

Ward also suggests using automated feeders, specifically those that can be programmed to feed four or more times per day.

> Don't turn a blind eye to weight gain. Talk to your veterinarian about your pet's weight and nutritional needs. Although it doesn't seem like much, gaining just one pound is significant weight gain for a cat. Overweight pets are at high risk for serious diseases like diabetes and arthritis.

Make the serious business of weight management fun

> Play hide-and-seek with cats. Hide small bowls (like soy sauce bowls) with a few kibbles in each room throughout house. This engages predatory drive and keeps them moving.

> Use interactive food puzzles. "I especially like those that roll around and the cat or dog has to bat, roll and move to dispense the kibble," Ward says.

> Take the usual walk around the block at a high-energy pace; switch it up and go to the park; play fetch with a new toy.