

Getting your small furry into shape



Introduction

Just like people, pets need to eat the right diet and get enough exercise to stay fit and healthy. But as many of us know, it's not always easy!

In this handy guide, you'll find lots of information on feeding and exercise to help you keep your small furry healthy and happy. And if your pet is carrying a few extra pounds, there's also advice on how you can help them lose weight and get back into shape.

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How do I know if my pet is a healthy shape?

Why are we talking about shape?

A pet's shape is a better way to tell if they're carrying extra weight rather than relying on the scales alone. That's because the ideal weight is different for every type and breed – but a healthy shape is the same for all pets.

It's good to get into the habit of checking your pet's shape every few weeks, starting when they're young. That way, you'll know what's normal for your pet – and they'll enjoy the extra attention!

Why should my pet stay slim?

- Your pet needs to be in good shape to be healthy and to have a long and happy life.
- Overweight pets will become old before their time. They will have less fun with you, which means you will have less fun with your pets.
- Weight problems lead to joint problems, arthritis, sugar diabetes, heart disease and other illnesses.
- As pets get older, they often slow down. Keeping pets an ideal shape means they will get more out of life.
- Operations are more risky for pets that are overweight.

How to check your pet's shape

With smaller pets, like hamsters and guinea pigs, the best thing to do is just look and see if they have a 'normal' shape for their breed. If they're looking a bit round, they may be overweight.

Your vet or vet nurse can show you how to check your pet's shape if you're not sure.



Diet

Pets come in many shapes and sizes. The type and amount of food they need depends on their breed, species, age, health and lifestyle. For example, guinea pigs need food that contains enough vitamin C, because their bodies can't produce it. Your pet needs fresh water to drink at all times.

What should I feed my pet?

If they have a choice of food, many small pets will start by eating the things they like best, and leave things they don't like till last. This can mean they don't get enough of the nutrients they really need. Small pets need a diet that's as close as possible to their natural food. Foods that take longer to eat and contain a lot of fibre are best: they're good for your pet's digestion, and help wear down their teeth, which keep growing for their whole life.

There are some foods you should avoid, or feed only in small amounts – such as peanuts. As well as being high in fat, peanuts can go mouldy, and break into sharp pieces that could scratch your pet's mouth and cheek pouches.

It sounds obvious, but pets that eat too much get fat! Many small pets are overweight. This could be because they're getting the wrong food, too many treats, or not enough exercise because their house or hutch is too small – and often all three.

If you feed your pet a lot of treats as well as their normal food, most of the extra calories will turn into fat. Pets don't need treats to know you love them; playing and spending time with you are what they enjoy most of all.

It's important not to make sudden changes to your pet's diet, as this can make them go off their food completely. If you're not sure what to feed your pet, ask your vet or vet nurse, and they'll be happy to help you.



What it means if your pet is overweight ...

For pets, being overweight can cause a whole host of health problems. These can include heart, liver and joint problems, breathing difficulties and diabetes; obese pets also find it harder to exercise, and cope with hot weather.

Pets put on weight simply by eating more food than they need. Luckily, in most cases, the answer is simple, too: it just takes time, and a bit of effort, to get them back into shape.

... and what you can do to help

Start by going to see your vet. They'll be able to advise on how you can help your pet lose weight. They can also weigh your pet for you, using special scales.

If your pet is just slightly overweight, feeding a bit less, or changing to a lower-calorie food, may be all you need to do.

Another top tip is to keep a food diary for a week, and take it with you when you go to see your vet. This can help you spot where your pet is getting the extra calories, and makes it easier to cut them out without a special diet.

YOUR PET'S FOOD DIARY

Day	Time	Why did you feed this food?	What you fed and how much

Helping your pet lose weight may take time and effort, but it's worth it. Stick with the plan, and your pet can look forward to a longer, healthier and happier life.

From the PAW Report

Every year, we produce our *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report* about how healthy and happy UK's pets really are.

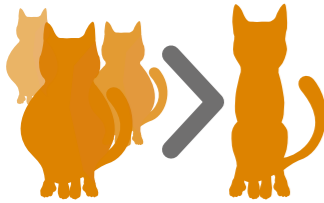

Diet

Our latest Report shows that too many people are still feeding their pets food that isn't good for them. Over 5.5 million pets get things like crisps, cake, leftovers, cheese, chips and takeaways as part of their normal diet – and more than 2 million owners feed treats because their pets beg for them.

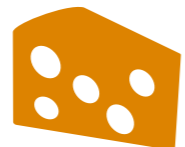
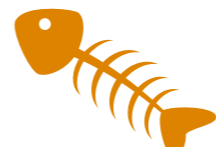
Not surprisingly, many vets tell us they now see a lot more overweight and obese pets – even though most owners know that obese pets have more health problems, and live shorter lives.

It's not all bad news, though. More owners are now feeding their pets based on body shape and weight than they were in 2011. This is really positive, but there's still a lot to do. We can deal with the obesity crisis facing the UK's pets: it just takes time and effort from owners.

80% OF VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS BELIEVE THERE WILL BE **MORE** OVERWEIGHT PETS THAN HEALTHY WEIGHT PETS IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



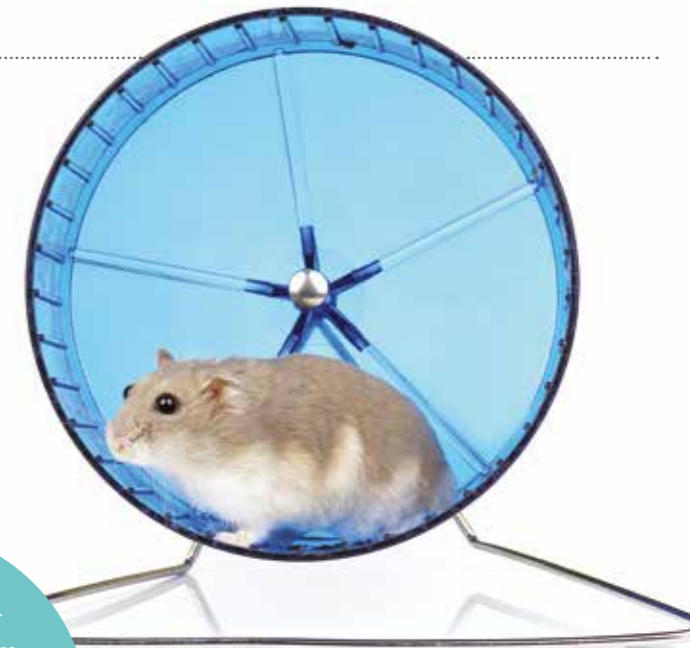
+++ OVER +++
5.5 MILLION PETS GET TREATS AS PART OF THEIR DAILY DIET INCLUDING:



Learn more about the health of pets in the UK today by reading our *PAW Report*:
pdsa.org.uk/PAWreport

Exercise

Pets rely on us to keep them fit and healthy. Playing with them is the best way to make sure they get enough exercise, especially if they live indoors. It's also a great way to bond with them, and show them how much you love them!



You can buy special toys for small pets, but most will be just as happy playing with cardboard boxes and tubes.

Whenever you let your pet out to play, make sure there are no holes they could escape through – or larger animals like cats and dogs around who might scare or attack them.



It's important not to make big or sudden changes to your pet's diet or exercise routine.

If you have any questions or concerns, your vet will be happy to help.



PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity

In our 51 Pet Hospitals UK-wide, we have more than **300 vets** and **600 nursing staff**, who carry out **2.7 million treatments** on more than **470,000 sick and injured pets** each year.

We care for pets whose owners are in real need, and can't afford vets' fees: we also help and advise owners on everyday care for their pets.

Treating our pet patients costs us more than £60 million a year, with every penny coming from donations.

For more information on the charity and its work:

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