Tackling Pet Obesity: It’s Not Easy, But It’s the Best Work!

When I started my career as a veterinary technician, I had my hands full of “normal” work. I gave advice about food and prevention methods at the front desk. I made X-rays at the request of the veterinarian and used the microscope in the lab. My job included keeping animals alive that were under anesthesia and being a good team member.
We saw many overweight animals at our practice, but we were not really doing anything about it.

However, one week early in my career, my boss suggested at a staff meeting that all the vet techs should do something “extra,” maybe start some type of program. I told my boss that I wanted to start a weight-loss program, and it became quite the thing!

A ROCKY BEGINNING

Twenty years ago, this type of program wasn’t the “norm.” In fact, one of my bosses laughed about it and said he did not want to be there when I did “Weight Watchers” for dogs.

My first thought was, Okay, it’s your business. But then I thought, Okay, I will show him it’s a good thing to do. I’ll show him it will bring good things for the animals and our practice.

I’ve always have been the stubborn type, so I told my practice I would create a decent program that would work for everyone. My cheeks were burning when I came out of the meeting, but already, a few colleagues told me they liked the idea and wanted to help. That gave me the energy to hit the ground running.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

For me, these characteristics were important to building a successful program:

● It must be simple for every staff member and easy to execute.
● It should not be costly for the practice or pet owners.
● It should not be overly time-consuming.
● The results had to be clear for the staff and pet owners, so having good before/after pictures were important.

Pet owners and pets would come in every 2 weeks for a weight consultation with a vet tech, with the first visit taking about 20 minutes. We would communicate with the owners and formulate a plan based on the pet’s age and target weight.

For a plan to be successful, the whole staff should be informed about it, and at least one other staff member should conduct appointments with the client. The rest of the staff should talk to pet owners about your plan. That means vet techs and vets.

Here are some rules we followed:

● Make a plan with good food. We use Hills r/d and Metabolic, but there are plenty of options.
● Give owners goodies to take home. When you do, all the “extras” will be under your control. Otherwise, the owners may give treats without telling you.
● Make a follow-up appointment right away. When pet owners must call for an appointment, they often forget. Or, when they think the animal didn’t lose weight, they probably won’t call.
● Do not give them a number of how much weight we want the animal to lose in 2 weeks. I only gave them the weight goal to attain. And I also didn’t tell them when that should be so they wouldn’t worry about how fast the pet should be losing weight.

THERE’S ALWAYS A SOLUTION

One of my best learning experiences was with a dog named Bas that belonged to a pub owner. Bas was 36 kilos and should have weighed about 26, but the owner had 2 problems. First, he loved to give the dog snacks. Second, all the guests loved to do that, too! During the day, many of the tourists were sitting on the terrace and ordering tea or coffee. In Holland, that’s always served with a cookie. When the dog saw the order go out to the table, he would run outside and sit in front of the tourists. The dog had a big advantage. He had the most beautiful puppy eyes you have ever seen. So when he looked at the guests, they didn’t have the heart to eat the cookie themselves! In the evening,
he’d do the same thing inside the pub, begging guests for the sausage they would get with their beer.

When Bas started getting pain in his joints, the first thing we needed to do was have him lose weight. The owner had already tried that with another vet, but nothing had happened. So we had a nice long talk and made a plan.

First, I crafted a sign 1 meter high by 1 meter wide. It said, “Bas has pain in his joints and cannot walk well anymore. We have to help him. Please do not feed anything to him except what you get from us.” Then we placed it in front of the pub.

From that moment on, every time the pub served coffee and tea during the day, Hills t/d pallets were placed next to the cookie. Then, baked cookies of canned dry food were put next to every beer. And guess what? The people loved giving Bas healthy treats!

In 2 weeks, Bas lost one kilo. We put the starting weight of the dog on the sign in front of the pub, and every 2 weeks, we put the weight he lost on it. All the regular clients saw it as a joint effort. In the end, Bas lost 10 kilos and didn’t show signs of pain anymore. Happy dog, happy owners, happy pub visitors.

And, a really good advertisement for our clinic.

EVERYONE WINS

It’s also important to report good results. Once the pet has lost weight, take the pet to the back of your practice and show your colleagues. Make the staff enthusiastic and proud as well. Then, if the owner gives permission, put before-and-after pictures with a short story on your website and social media page. Finally, don’t forget to frame a picture of the successful animals for a wall in your practice.

When a pet loses weight, the owners usually feel so proud, they often tell everyone about it. They will enjoy the many compliments they get when they walk down the street with a super handsome dog or when their friends visit and see an active cat.

Most importantly, follow your vet tech heart! I think we all love animals, but we also love people. Otherwise, we would have already quit our jobs. Let your heart speak when you start with a new animal, and good results will follow. Because at the end of the day, that’s really all you need. TVN

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As we learn more about the composition and function of the microbiota, we will also need to address ways to keep this population as healthy and happy as the host it inhabits. The microbiota plays an important role in the development, immune regulation, and maintenance of health for all animals.3

References


Glossary

Prebiotic: A type of moderately fermentable fiber that can be used as an energy source by resident intestinal bacteria.

Probiotic: A classification of live bacteria that are believed to confer benefits on the host when consumed.

Saccharides: carbohydrates, including sugars; may be made of single molecules (monosaccharides), such as lactose, sucrose, and fructose; small groups of molecules (oligosaccharides), such as fructooligosaccharides; or chains of molecules (polysaccharides), such as inulin.

Specific pathogen-free (germ-free) animal: Animals raised under laboratory conditions to prevent colonization by many normal bacterial species and are therefore guaranteed to be free of specific pathogens that may interfere with an experiment.

Xenobiotic: Chemical substance found within an organism that is not normally naturally produced by or expected to be present in that organism; also, substances that are present in much higher concentrations than are usual.
The Weight is Over

87% of pets lost weight.¹

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