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PETS

THE CAT DOC

## Portion control for the fat cat

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SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Cats in the wild spend a large part of their day hunting and catching food, so it is rare for a wild or feral cat to be overweight. Our house cats have easy lives and usually just need to meow or look at us to be fed.

Feeding a cat, or giving treats, is one of the few things we can do that elicits pleasant feedback from our cat. You know your house cat really needs you to provide food, and it creates a bond.

In my last column I suggested appropriate feeding portions for cats, but my clients often tell me their cat is driving them crazy by demanding more food than what I tell them to feed. Do you break your bond, or do you give in and make your cat fat and happy?

I urge you to be strong and retrain your cat's eating habits. Just like overweight humans, overweight cats are at risk for arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, fatty liver disease, urinary tract infections and skin problems. They also cannot keep themselves clean and can be messy around the house.

If your cat overeats, you need to feed two to three small portions throughout the day that add up to a proper caloric intake. One way to achieve this and to remove "you" from the feeding process is by installing an automatic feeder.

Believe it or not, if a machine starts feeding your cat, your cat will stop bothering you for more food. There are many types of au-

tomatic feeders, and some are designed to feed canned food.

Pet feeders can be found in pet stores and on the Internet. One local business, Smart Home (16542 Millikan Ave., Irvine 92606), has a large variety of feeders.

Reducing portions should occur over several weeks, so the stomach can shrink slowly.

Most overweight cats are not playful, so increasing exercise to help with weight loss is tough. Try to find toys that will motivate your cat to move. Another strategy is using part of your cat's food portion for exercise. Many cats will chase around after individual kibbles of food. Throw pieces of food around the floor and make your cat go after it.

Consider putting small amounts of your cat's food portion in different places around the house, so the cat actually has to get up and exercise to find food. If you also have a young or thin cat you want to supplement with food, try putting this cat's food at a high location the overweight one cannot reach, or in a separate area.

### FEEDING TIME FOR MULTIPLE CATS

Controlling food portions in a multi-cat household is even more important. In most households with more than one cat, one cat is thin and another one is heavy.

There is no doubt that certain cats have faster metabolisms than others and can eat more, but eating and dominating the food bowl are ways that certain cats express their territoriality. I assure you that if you control portions for the total number of cats, your

trim cats will maintain, and your heavy cats will lose weight.

There are different feeding strategies for weight loss. The most common ones are:

- Feeding all canned food,
- Feeding high protein/low carbohydrate foods (The CATkins Diet), and
- Feeding lower calorie/high fiber foods.

I have had success with each of these as long as the owner has been willing to control portions. The idea behind feeding all canned food is that most canned food is high in protein and water, and these nutrients provide more satiation for a cat.

When a cat eats a high protein/low carbohydrate diet, the theory is that it takes more time and energy to digest protein than carbs, so the cat is not getting the quick sugar fix.

Lastly, if the cat eats a lower calorie/high fiber diet, he can eat a larger portion and get filled up better. Consider discussing which diet strategy would work best with your cat with your veterinarian.

I urge owners of young cats to start out with good feeding practices. Feed good foods in controlled portions. Free feeding unlimited dry food doesn't work for most cats, and definitely doesn't work in a multicat household.

Dieting a cat is hard work and can be frustrating, but trim cats are more active and healthier, so it is worth it!

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