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True Tales from the Vet's Office: By Dr. Craig Buffington

What's on Your Pet's Menu?

The Pet food Recall – Food Toxicity Still a “Big” Problem



A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO I was online reading about the current veterinary issues on the Veterinary Information Network (VIN) and read about the massive recall on multiple brands of pet food due to several unexplained deaths. The food was tainted with a toxin that attacks the kidneys and in high enough concentrations can cause lethal renal failure. Fortunately none of my patients, including those ingesting the foods on the recall list, has had any elevations in the kidney tests we performed.

However, there is a food toxicity that has been killing hundreds of thousands of pets for many, many years. It has caused liver failure, diabetes, premature joint injury and arthritis. Many owners have no idea that they are poisoning their loved ones with a toxicity called “Hypercaloric Ingestion Toxicity.” Okay, that’s my own term for “obesity,” but I think it drives an important point home.

We are killing our pets with kindness when we feed them excessive amounts of calories that we think make our pets look “healthier.”

Did you know the current recommendation for feline nutrition is to feed canned food only? Since cats are obligate carnivores (only need meat in their diets), they should have a high protein, low-to-no carbohydrate diet! Cats only need 8% or less carbs and many of the dry foods today have 30-60% pure sugar!

Many of my clients have asked, “What about their teeth Dr. B, won’t eating canned food cause them to get more tartar buildup and need more dental cleanings?” Yes, it will likely mean more cleanings, but this is better than liver disease or life-long diabetes!

THE CURE FOR “HYPERCALORIC INGESTION TOXICITY”

You may be thinking “...so now you want me to start buying that expensive weight

loss food, right?” Not necessarily. The pet food companies will not be too pleased with what I am about to tell you, but experience has shown me that obesity in pets is no different from obesity in us (yes I throw myself into this mix). Nutrition is not as complicated as many people make it out to be. Obesity is simply (in most cases) a matter of mathematics and the formula goes something like this:

$$\text{Obesity} = \text{Caloric intake} - \text{calories burned}$$

When we take in more calories than we burn, there are extra calories left over that the body stores as fat. Our pets’ bodies are no different.

But what if we have an obese animal already? I recommend you concentrate on just four areas.

DR. B'S LOSE WEIGHT NOW, ASK ME HOW! STRATEGY

1. Feed proper portions of a balanced dog/cat food

I once questioned an owner of a very obese lab about how much he was feeding his dog to which he replied, “...just two cups a day doc.” Further questioning revealed the owner was using two 60 oz super big gulp cups to scoop the food. This made me always ask how many 8 oz cups someone is feeding. Many pets are just being fed too much of their regular food!

2. Watch the Treats!

While I want your buddy to have his/her treats for doing their tricks, treats add a TREMENDOUS amount of calories to a diet. Some dog biscuits have the same calories as one whole scoop of ice cream every time you give them to your friend! Try baby carrots, celery, cherry tomatoes, or fresh fruit as an alternative. There are many low-cal high fiber treats available from your veterinarian as well.

3. NO PEOPLE FOOD!

I know that dog or cat food seems really boring to feed to our pets every day, but

they do not know the difference (as long as they never get our food) and animals do not sit around thinking “... man, if I could just have some decent food instead of this bland food everyday then I would really feel loved by my family!” If our diets were as balanced as many dog and cat diets we all would be much healthier! Our food adds way too many calories to our animals diets, so don’t feed that left over pizza to Fido!

4. Exercise!

Over the years I’ve seen a wonderful transformation in the animal-human world, and that is the movement of animals from the backyard to the living room of our lives. The downside to this is they do what we do: eat and watch TV! When I mention exercise, as little as 10-15 minutes 3 times a week of just walking will burn tons of calories – for everyone! For our feline friends, get them up and moving with a laser pen light or their favorite toy, just get them moving!

There are those rare cases when a physical problem, such as hypothyroidism in dogs, can cause weight gain. However, the majority of pets are obese because of too many calories! Certainly, low-fat prescription diets have their place and I will use them for my overweight patients, but most will improve greatly by following these four simple steps.

I hope I’ve proven a point today that too much of a good thing can be very bad and an ounce of activity is worth a pound of fat!

If you have any questions regarding the food recall go to www.menufoods.com or call Stonebrook Veterinary Clinic for details on kidney testing and the brands involved.

