



# HOW MUCH SHOULD MY DOG EAT?

## WHAT'S YOUR REAL CUP SIZE?

By: Travis County Kennel Club



Canine obesity is the most common nutritional problem seen in vet clinics in North America.

It is estimated 30 percent of adult dogs are overweight. Any breed can become overweight but it is most commonly seen in Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Beagles and Pugs.

Being obese for a long period of time predisposes your dog to joint disease, respiratory disease, pancreatitis, diabetes, skin disease, cancers and heart problems. In a study conducted by Purina, dogs that were considered moderately overweight (not obese) for their lifetime had a 15 percent reduction in life span.

In other words, overweight and obese dogs die younger.

### **But it's my hormones . . .**

Sometimes it actually is.

BEFORE STARTING ANY DIET PLEASE GET YOUR DOG'S THYROID CHECKED BY YOUR VETERINARIAN.

It's a simple blood test and low thyroid (hypothyroidism) is frequently the reason dogs gain weight even though their food intake remains the same. Some studies have shown there is actually a higher incidence of hypothyroidism in dogs that are spayed or neutered at a young age.

### **How Much Should My Dog Eat?**

Surprisingly, not as much as you think.

For instance, the average Golden or Labrador Retriever eats two cups a day. That's one actual eight-ounce cup (not a Rudy's 32-ouncer or a Big Gulp cup) twice a day.

Yes, there are exceptions – but they are very few.

In general, intact dogs can eat more food than spayed or neutered dogs. Research has shown that a dog's metabolisms slow down within 24 hours of being spayed or neutered (those hormones again).

And obviously exercise makes a difference too. Just like us, dogs that get lots of exercise can eat more.

## **But the Bag Says...**

The goal of the dog food manufacturer is to sell dog food. Obviously they are going to err on the side of too much food instead of not enough food.

Thus, “the back of the bag” cannot really be trusted. In many cases, it recommends a significant amount more than your dog should actually be eating. First off, forget what the back of the bag says. It doesn’t bother the manufacturer if that “extra half cup” they recommend actually adds unwanted pounds to your dog year after year.

Also, food recommendations on the bag of dog food don’t take into consideration the breed, exercise levels or whether the dog is intact or spayed or neutered. “But he’s 87 pounds!” you exclaim.

Yes, and you made him that way. Many people find their 87-pound overweight dog on the back of the bag and think they need to feed for an 87-pound dog.

Instead you should feed for a 70-pound dog; the weight he should be and not the dog's current 87-pound (over-) weight.

**A good rule of thumb is feed the dog, not the bowl.**

## **What if it's Diet Food?**

Just because it’s diet food doesn’t mean that you should eat the whole package.

Diet foods are usually lower in calories but they are also lower in other nutrients too. It is interesting that a dog that normally should eat 2 cups of food a day frequently eats 3 cups of diet food.

Just because it’s a Lean Cuisine it doesn’t mean you should eat two at a time. Diet foods are misleading and difficult to administer the correct amounts. We find it is best to feed your dog a good quality dog food but smaller portions. Dogs can lose weight while still eating the normal amount for their breed.

Of course this means no in between meal snacks and carefully measured portions.

## **Those Treats Add Up**

Some dogs are actually eating the proper amounts they should be eating in their bowl. As with us, it is the snacks that put on those extra pounds.

We’ve actually taken a large dog cookie, broken it up and measured the amount. In many cases it’s half a cup of food (or 120 calories). That is **more than 10%** of the daily requirement for a 75-pound dog.

A teaspoon of oil contains 40 calories; that's 25% of the daily requirement for a 5-pound dog. All those studies that show how just a couple of soft drinks a week can add up to an extra ten pounds a year are true for our canine friends too.

An extra 4 ounces in the form of a cookie can really add up day after day.

There are low calorie treats available or you can just put a handful of their kibble (subtracted from their regular meal, of course) in your pocket and dole that out as a special treat.

They honestly won't know the difference and will probably think they are getting special "people food." And to make your dog feel full there is always the tried and true method of adding canned green beans or canned pumpkin to your dog's meal.

Rice cakes, popcorn and fresh carrots make good in between meal snacks.

## **How Do I Know if My Dog is Getting Too Much Food?**

Like us, your dog should have a waist. Looking down from the top your dog should not look like a tube. It should look like an hourglass. You should be able to feel your dog's ribs easily (you shouldn't have to dig for them). You should be able to feel your dog's spine and hip bones, but not see them.

You should also be able to feel the tips of the shoulder blades and the last rib in your dog.

Other clues that your dog may be packing a few extra pounds are wrinkles over the withers or shoulders.

Fat pads on the back or at the base of the tail indicate extreme obesity.

Check out [this PDF from Purina dog food](#). →

It includes drawings and descriptions of canine body conditions, from emaciated to obese. *(click image for web download)*

**Nestlé PURINA**  
**BODY CONDITION SYSTEM**

|           |   |   |  |   |
|-----------|---|---|--|---|
| TOO THIN  | 1 | Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, pelvic bones and all bony prominences evident from a distance. No discernible body fat. Obvious loss of muscle mass.  |  | 1 |
|           | 2 | Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Some evidence of other bony prominence. Minimal loss of muscle mass.   |  | 2 |
|           | 3 | Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.  |  | 3 |
| IDEAL     | 4 | Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.   |  | 4 |
|           | 5 | Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side.  |  | 5 |
| TOO HEAVY | 6 | Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernible viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.  |  | 6 |
|           | 7 | Ribs palpable with difficulty; heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be present.   |  | 7 |
|           | 8 | Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent. No abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distention may be present. |  | 8 |
|           | 9 | Massive fat deposits over thorax, spine and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and limbs. Obvious abdominal distention.  |  | 9 |

The BODY CONDITION SYSTEM was developed at the Nestlé Purina Pet Care Center and has been validated as documented in the following publications:  
Hawley D, Borges JW, Mason T, et al. Comparison of body fat estimates by dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry and deuterium oxide dilution in client-owned dogs. *Compendium* 2007; 29 (A4): 70  
Inlayman DR. Development and Validation of a Body Condition Score System for Dogs. *Canine Practice* July/August 1997; 22:10-15  
Keddy, et al. Effects of Diet Restriction on Life Span and Age-Related Changes in Dogs. *JAVMA* 2002; 282:1316-1320  
Call 1-800-222-VETS (8387), weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:20 p.m. CT

**Nestlé PURINA**

Most dogs consume food *very quickly* and in one sitting.

If your dog picks at his/her food or leaves it all day long and doesn't finish it until dinnertime, then you could be over-feeding your dog.

Another sign is a high volume of stool. Some dogs don't even gain weight with extra food; they just eliminate the excess.

Excess stool can also be a sign of poor quality, not easily digested food.

Just like us, **even half a cup of food too much** can translate into an extra pound or two a month until pretty soon your dog is very overweight. Some lucky dogs don't actually gain the unwanted pounds but instead produce a lot of stool. Eliminating twice a day is normal. Producing several stools a day is not normal and is frequently a sign of an overfed dog.

Check out this PDF Purina dog food. It includes drawings and descriptions of canine body conditions, from emaciated to obese.



For further reading and information: Purina® Body Condition System is a nine-point system that evaluates a dog's body condition. [Learn More at ProPlan.com](http://ProPlan.com)

## **But My Dog is Hungry**

Of course it is. Almost all dogs act hungry all the time.

They are opportunists. It is in their best interest to eat every chance they get and to stock up when they can. In fact, a dog that doesn't eat every time you feed it is usually either sick or stressed. I know it feels like you are depriving your child but honestly, who gets to eat everything he/she wants all the time without some serious consequences? Wouldn't we all love to just eat ice cream and chocolate all day long? Dogs are not any different. I know we want to indulge them but we risk shortening their lives by doing so.

You can have great success helping your pet shed unwanted pounds by continuing to feed a high quality dog food (not "diet" food) in the amounts appropriate for the size and breed of dog, combined with running free in a fenced in area and play yard exercise.

No treadmill or beach running until your pet is closer to a normal weight because steady jogging would put too much strain on an overweight dog's joints.

The following are the average amounts of food for various breeds.  
 Once again these are **based on an 8-ounce** measuring cup  
 (not a 32 oz Big Gulp cup).

| 2 CUPS 2X/DAY   | 1 CUP 2X/DAY         | 1/2 CUP 2X/DAY  | 1/3 CUP 2X/DAY        | 1/4 CUP 2X/DAY                                    |
|---|----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| Viszlas   | Labrador Retrievers* | Springer Spaniels*  | Some Beagles*         | Dachshunds*                                       |
| Weimaraners   | Golden Retrievers*   | Cocker Spaniels   | Terriers              | Most toy breeds<br>(Maltese, Poms, Yorkies, Paps) |
| Great Pyrenees  | Boxers               |  | Big Scotties          | Chihuahuas  |
| Some Border Collies   | Dobermans            |   | Jack Russell Terriers |   |
|  | Rottweilers          |   | Miniature Schnauzers* |   |
|   | Standard Poodles     |   | Some Scotties         |   |
|   | Most Doodles         |   | Most Beagles          |   |

\* Breeds with asterisks rarely vary unless they are intact and/or in heavy training

We realize some of these amounts seem very small. And yes, there are some exceptions to the above but they are very rare. We have surveyed many breeders and owners for a consensus of how much they feed their particular breed and the above amounts are the common denominators for those breeds. The breeds with asterisks rarely vary unless they are intact and/or in heavy training.

## **What is Canine Obesity?**

According to Elizabeth Pask and Laura Scott, authors of “Overeaters Anonymous, the Biggest Canine Loser,” obesity occurs when a dog weighs more than 10 to 15 percent above his ideal or fit body weight.

For instance, a Chihuahua that should weigh 5 pounds will be obese if he carries an extra half-pound, while a Labrador Retriever who should weigh 66 pounds might not be obese until he weighs more than 73 pounds.

The following table is from their article (printed in *Modern Canine*). [Read Full Article](#)

### **OBESE WEIGHTS BY DOG'S SIZE**

|                   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |     |     |     |
|-------------------|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Fit weight (lb)   | 4 | 11 | 22 | 33 | 44 | 55 | 66 | 77 | 66  | 99  | 110 | 121 |
| Obese weight (lb) | 5 | 13 | 26 | 37 | 51 | 64 | 77 | 90 | 101 | 114 | 128 | 141 |

## **What is the BIG DEAL?!**

I know it sometimes feels like everyone is harping about your dog's weight, but it's only because we care.

Dogs get all the same obesity related illnesses we get and it is very frustrating to see pets gain weight year after year even though they can't open the refrigerator or pour the food in their bowl.

If you're have trouble resisting those puppy dog eyes and tend to over-indulge your darling, take your dog for a walk around the block—they'll like that even better.

We want to see your companion live a long and healthy life!

### More TCKC Posts on Dog Health

#### **For more information on your dog's diet, visit:**

- [modernDog – Overeaters Anonymous](#)
- [Dog Food Advisor – Determining Your Dog's Ideal Weight](#)
- [10 more People Foods for Dogs – modernDog](#)
- [The Do's and Dont's of Sharing Food with Your Dog – modernDog](#)



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