

This Mistake Could Rob You of Precious Years With Your Cat

You may consider it normal, even cute. And it may be a sign of your amazing generosity and love. But this mistake could rob you of years with your precious cat. And all it takes is a few tweaks to greatly improve your cat's longevity, comfort, and health. Get started today.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Almost 60 percent of U.S. cats are overweight or obese due to over-indulgence by pet owners, too much biologically inappropriate food, and lack of exercise
- Fat cats don't live as long as cats of a healthy weight, and their quality of life is often severely affected by obesity-related illnesses like arthritis, diabetes, and kidney disease
- Five steps guardians of overweight kitties can take to help their pet lose weight include practicing portion control, feeding the appropriate amount of daily calories, offering a species-appropriate diet, feeding kitties in a multi-cat household separately, and insuring their cat gets some exercise each day

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A shocking statistic all of us who love cats should be aware of is that almost 60 percent of kitties in the U.S. are overweight or obese.¹ And it's a sad fact that the problem is caused by cat guardians through simple over-indulgence. This includes feeding biologically inappropriate food and too much of it, feeding too many unhealthy treats, and rarely or never encouraging Fluffy to get physically active.

If your cat is fat, it's no joking matter. If she stays fat, she'll live a shorter life than her slimmer counterparts. Her quality of life will be compromised by mobility and hygiene issues due to her weight, plus any number of painful, debilitating obesity-related diseases, including arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, respiratory problems, and kidney disease.

I'm sure you want your beloved cat with you for as long as possible, and in good health. Why not start today helping your kitty return to a trimmer, healthier version of herself?

5 Ways to Slim Down Your Overweight Cat

1. **Feed portion-controlled meals on a consistent schedule** — In my experience, most owners of overweight cats serve their pets an all-day buffet. They put down a bowl of food and kitty is allowed to graze throughout the day. When the food gets low, the bowl is refilled.

Your cat is a carnivore whose instinct is to hunt his food. In the wild your kitty would hunt and catch one, two, or even three mice a day depending on his age and metabolic demand. Hunting is not grazing. Cats are not like horses, cows, or other grazing animals that require a constant supply of food in their digestive tracts.

The natural instinct of your cat is to eat a small amount of food followed by a fast, followed by another small amount of food and another fasting period. Kitties provided with a constant supply of available food turn into grazers. This is contrary to nature, and grazing cats very often consume too many calories from uncontrolled portion sizes.

Feeding two portion-controlled meals a day, one in the morning and one in the evening at about the same time each day, works well for most cats and also fits easily into the daily schedule for most families. If you're home during the day, you can feed several small meals instead, since one study shows that cats fed more often are more active.

As added incentive to give up free-feeding, once you transition your kitty to a species-appropriate diet (more about that shortly), you'll no longer be able to leave food out for her, as it will quickly spoil.

2. **Do the math** — In order to know how much food to feed your cat, you must calculate calories. I recommend checking with your veterinarian on the proper weight for your kitty.

To figure out how many calories your cat requires per day to achieve her ideal weight, first weigh her. Next, figure your kitty's weight in kilograms by dividing her weight in pounds by 2.2. So for example, if your cat weighs 15 pounds, her weight in kilograms is 15 divided by 2.2, or 6.82 kilograms. Multiply your cat's weight in kilograms by 30 and then add 70 to that result: $6.82 \text{ kilos} \times 30 = 205 + 70 = 275$. Now multiply that result by 0.8: $275 \times 0.8 = 220$. Your cat needs 220 calories in a day to maintain her 15-pound weight.

If your cat eats less than 220 calories she'll lose weight. If she gets over 220 calories a day, she'll gain weight. If you keep her right at those 220 calories, she'll maintain her current weight.

Let's say your 15-pound cat's ideal weight is 10 pounds. Here's how to calculate how many calories she should be eating:

$$10 \text{ pounds divided by } 2.2 = 4.55 \text{ kilograms}$$

$$4.55 \text{ kilos} \times 30 = 137$$

$$137 + 70 = 207$$

$$207 \times 0.8 = 166 \text{ calories}$$

To get your kitty down to her ideal weight of 10 pounds, you need to feed her about 166 calories in a 24 hour period – not the 220 calories she's been eating. So decreasing her caloric intake slightly over time will allow for slow and healthy weight loss.

3. **Feed a species-appropriate diet** — If your cat is eating kibble, he'll need to be slowly and safely transitioned to the right nutrition for his species. Cats require a balanced, moisture dense, fresh meat diet that you can either make at home from recipes, or purchase from a retailer. Not only will the right food help with weight loss, it will make your feline companion much healthier for the long haul. I've known for decades that

kibble is very detrimental to the health of kitties. Fortunately, we're starting to see a number of mainstream scientific studies showing the all-around benefits of wet food for cats.

Remember, most dry food addicts will not eat raw food, initially. Your first step is to transition to canned food. Once your cat is off dry food and onto canned food, the transition from canned to fresh food is relatively easy.

Cats can also get fat eating too much of a fresh food diet, without appropriate exercise. So make sure to calculate appropriate caloric intake for your cat, regardless of what type of food he's eating.

4. **Feed cats separately in multi-cat households** — Some kitties are ravenous eaters, while others are perpetually picky. If you happen to have both types of eaters in your home, it's best to separate everyone at mealtime. This gives you the ability to precisely control the amount of food each kitty is served, lets you know immediately if someone's appetite drops off or picks up noticeably (both can be signs of illness), and solo dining also allows each cat to eat at his or her own pace without any need to resource-guard.
5. **Get Fluffy moving on a daily basis** — The good news is that your indoor-only cat is much safer from trauma, disease, and general mischief than indoor/outdoor cats. The not-so-good news is that indoor cats often don't get much exercise, and they also don't get to ground themselves.

Make sure your cat has things to climb on, like a multi-level cat tree or tower. Invest in a laser toy, either a very inexpensive, simple one or something a bit more sophisticated like the Frolicat™ line. When considering other kitty diversions, think like a hunter and choose toys and activities that appeal to your cat's stalking instinct.

Don't overlook old standbys, either, like dragging a piece of string across the floor in view of your cat. Ping-pong balls are another oldie but goodie, along with bits of paper rolled into balls, and pretty much any light object that can be made to move fast and in unanticipated ways. For more ideas on how to challenge your cat both physically and mentally, take a look at my interview with cat behaviorist Jackson Galaxy.

I also recommend walking your cat in nice weather using a harness. This gets him out into the fresh air, stimulates his senses, and gets his paws in direct contact with the ground. An alternative is a safe, fully enclosed porch or patio area that prevents your cat from getting out and other animals from getting in.

I hope I've given you some ideas to help you start getting your chunky kitty back down to a healthy weight. It's already mid-February, and cats need to lose weight slowly for their health. So if Fluffy is hoping to fit into her bikini this summer, it's time to get moving!

Sources and References

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¹ Association for Pet Obesity Prevention
