

Weight Control in a Two-Cat House

Exercise alone won't help a cat lose weight. The two cats may need separate mealtimes.

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Q. I have two cats, Tozi and Maggie. My Maggie is a 19-month-old tabby mix. Maggie weighs about 11 pounds, and Tozi is only 7 pounds. Maggie has become lazy, but I try to keep her as active as I can. I've had them both on a brand name weight management dry food, and this is one of the few foods that Tozi can eat without her eyes watering and her sneezing.

My problem is that I can't keep Maggie out of Tozi's food bowl. I really need your help. I'm concerned that Tozi doesn't get enough of her own food, while Maggie keeps tipping the scale. A. I am happy to see how concerned you are about your cat's weight! Obesity is linked to a myriad of problems in cats, and 85 percent of the cats I see are overweight. Trying to keep Maggie active is a great idea, and I certainly do not want to discourage any exercise that you have instituted. But exercise alone will not control weight, and diet must also be addressed.

It sounds as though Tozi has a food allergy, and you were fortunate to find something that she does well on. When I am working with a cat that has a weight problem, I first try switching the cat to a canned diet. Recent research regarding cats and their dietary needs has centered on the fact that they are true carnivores, and their metabolism is extremely different than that of a dog including their dietary needs.

The simple truth is that all dry cat foods are higher in carbohydrates than what a cat in the wild might consume. Cats obtain most of their energy needs from protein and fat, yet carbohydrates may not be the preferred source for cats. Another interesting fact is that cats eat to meet their protein requirements, not to satisfy their carbohydrate needs, as people and dogs do. In some cases, cats will eat too much dry food in an attempt to satisfy their protein needs. These eating habits result in consuming too many carbohydrates, which eventually turn into fat; therefore, canned foods are preferred over dry diets for weight loss.

Then, of course, there are the individual factors of inherent metabolic differences and behavior. Some cats seem simply predisposed to be heavier, much like people. Exercise level is a factor, but still, even two people that exercise similarly can have different weight gain patterns.