

Does My Cat Need Liposuction?

CatChannel veterinary expert, Arnold Plotnick, DVM, says a diet, not weight-loss surgery, can help a cat slim down.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: Are there any surgical options for reducing a cat's weight? I have a 23-pound cat that won't eat any wet food and doesn't get much exercise, although I play with him every day. I know it sounds drastic, but I think gastric banding or liposuction might be a way to force his weight down.

A: While it may be possible, in theory, to perform these surgical procedures on a cat for the purpose of losing weight, it currently is not done in veterinary medicine.

Getting cats to lose weight can be a daunting task. There are three basic ways to do it: Feed your cat the same diet you've been feeding, but just feed less of it. However, most cats won't stand for this and will pester you for food day and night.

Feed a diet low in fat and high in fiber.

Feed a diet high in protein, and low in carbohydrates.

Exercise helps and is fairly easy with dogs — you can play Frisbee or walk them for an extra 30 minutes in the park. But cats aren't as easy when it come to exercise.

With cats, the main focus is on diet. In recent years, many have touted the use of a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet for cats, since cats are obligate carnivores and aren't designed to handle carbohydrates. However, in my experience, the tried and true low-fat, high-fiber diets work better.

The high fiber gives cats a feeling of fullness, and they are less likely to feel unsatisfied and complain. There are many prescription diets that fit this bill, and your veterinarian can prescribe these diets, along with a recommendation as to the proper amount to feed.

Weight loss in cats always should be gradual. Rapid weight loss in an obese cat can lead to a dangerous liver disorder called hepatic lipidosis, also known as "fatty liver disease." Ideally, the goal is for your cat to achieve his or her ideal weight in six to nine months. After your cat reaches the target weight, the diet can be readjusted to help your cat maintain this ideal weight, rather than lose too much or gain it back.