

## How Can I Get My Cat to Lose Weight?

**Arnold Plotnick, DVM, gives three ways fat cats can lose weight.**

Shadow, sitting pretty but very unhealthy at 21 pounds. (Photo courtesy of Christine Abbott-Irwin)Q: My adopted cat Shadow is an indoor-only cat, and he loves people and food. Throughout the years, he continues to gain weight. His tummy sways back and forth when he walks. He is currently topped-out at 21 pounds. I give him a 1/3 cup of food twice a day. In addition to that, I give him a 1/4 cup of milk every morning.

Shadow lives for his milk. He goes crazy without it. I've given him milk for at least eight years, and his bowel movements are fine. Last year, the vet said that Shadow should go on a low-calorie, canned food, so I bought a case and tried it. Shadow would not touch the food. He has always been on Science Diet Light dry cat food.

Shadow will go back to the vet soon for his yearly exam. Every year, I worry about his health, diabetes, kidneys, etc. Last year his kidneys were healthy, and he did not have diabetes. I don't know what to do to get my cat to lose weight. (He has to have his milk). Do you have any suggestions on how my cat can lose weight?

A: Whoa! That is one huge cat! Shadow is dangerously obese, and he is at an increased risk for diabetes, liver disease, heart problems and urinary tract problems, to name a few. I'm glad that you realize he's overweight and that you've tried to get him to shed some pounds.

There are basically three ways to get your cat to lose weight:

Feed your cat the same food, but feed him less of it.

Feed your cat a high-fiber, low-fat diet.

Feed your cat a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet.

The first option rarely works because cats protest too much when you deprive them of food.

I've had success with the high-fiber, low-fat diets. The Hill's company makes Science Diet Prescription r/d, in both canned and dry varieties. Fiber makes cats feel "full," so they usually don't pester their owners for more food.

The high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets have received a lot of press in the past few months. Cats are true carnivores; they're less proficient at metabolizing carbohydrates compared to omnivores, such as dogs. If you feed a diet that is high in protein, with moderate fat and very little carbohydrates, cats will burn the fat preferentially over the protein. They lose fat and maintain lean body mass.

Talk to your vet about these options, and don't give up too easily. If your cat doesn't like the taste of one diet, ask your vet for an alternative brand. Once your vet calculates the number of calories that your cat should intake to lose weight, make sure he also calculates how many calories Shadow receives from his daily milk and adjusts his feeding recommendations accordingly. (Don't worry; I won't suggest discontinuing the milk. It's obvious from your letter that receiving his daily milk is the highlight of Shadow's day).

Regards,  
Arnold Plotnick, DVM