

## Feline Weight Loss 101

**A step-by-step guide to help kitty shed those unhealthy extra pounds.**

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The bad news: Overweight cats are at risk for many health issues, like diabetes and urinary tract disorders. The good news: Cat parents can implement weight-loss programs for their portly pets to get them back into tip-top shape! Here's how:

**Week 1: Getting Started**Time for a weigh-in (yes, put kitty on a scale!). Determine how much weight kitty needs to lose by visiting your vet. Choose a diet food (high fiber/high protein/prescription). Remove all other sources of food from the cat's environment. Provide kitty with the diet food, with each serving containing 20 percent fewer calories than a serving of the nondiet food. All weight-loss regimens should be conducted with a vet's supervision.

**Week 2: Assessing and Adjusting**Weigh kitty again; if the weight loss equals more than 2 percent of the original weight, increase the serving size this week. If weight loss equals less than 2 percent, decrease the serving size. Right at 2 percent? Keep the serving size the same. Increase the cat's activity by introducing at least one new toy.

**Week 3: Seeing Results**Repeat the weigh-in; adjust food servings as described in Week 2 using Week 2's weight as the new basis. If no weight loss has occurred, take kitty to the vet to check for underlying medical conditions. Keep kitty active by encouraging play time: pull a string around the house to entice movement.

**Week 4: Maintaining the Routine**Time to hit the scale again; this time, use Week 3's starting weight as a basis. Adjust meal sizes accordingly. If kitty still needs to shed a few pounds, continue the routine. If the goal weight has been achieved, congratulations!

Remember that maintaining a cat's ideal weight means controlling portion sizes even after the desired weight is reached.

Kristin Grant, a freelance writer from Baton Rouge, La., has three cats, one of which adores grazing at the food bowl all day long and may be in need of this regimen in the imminent future.