

# New Survey Reveals the Weighty Impact of Excess Weight for Dogs - and their Owners

*Purina Pro Plan® Veterinary Diets® survey for National Pet Obesity Awareness Day indicates physical and emotional toll*

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 11, 2023 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- A new survey<sup>1</sup> from Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets, released today – National Pet Obesity Awareness Day – found that excess physical weight in dogs carries an emotional weight for their owners, and that many owners view their dogs as thinner than they really are. Results showed that approximately 1 in 5 dog-owning households consider one or more of their dogs to be overweight. However, according to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)<sup>2</sup>, the number of overweight dogs in the United States has reached a record high, with 59% of evaluated dogs in the U.S. either overweight (37%) or having obesity (22%).

The Pro Plan Veterinary Diets survey, which engaged more than 600 U.S. dog owners who identified their dog as overweight, also pointed out the physical and emotional factors contributing to excess weight and how these hinder dog owners from helping their pets.

"Dogs do not always gain excess weight due to a lack of care from their owners", noted APOP President Ernie Ward, DVM. "If anything, an overweight dog may be a sign that the owner cares *too* much about their dog's happiness. But while it's often said that 'food is love,' feeding a pet too much could lead to an overall reduced quality of life."

## **The Emotional Impact of Excess Weight**

The new survey revealed that excess weight gain in pets can be related to the emotions owners experience around feeding and treating:

- 75% of surveyed owners agreed they feel guilty when their dogs appear hungry.
- 67% agreed food is a primary source of their dog's happiness.
- 67% agreed they bond with their dog by feeding him/her treats and don't want to lose that bond.
- 54% agreed they feed their dog more food, table scraps or treats when their pet begs for them.

Despite their fears about losing the bond with their dogs, 88% of surveyed owners whose dogs are overweight agreed their pets' body condition *does* concern them and 92% agreed that weight loss would be beneficial. These beliefs may be fueled by weight-related behavior changes in their pet that can impact the owner:

- 92 percent of surveyed owners agree they are sad when their dog can't participate in activities they previously enjoyed when their weight was ideal.
- 45% indicate their dog has less energy for playtime, 44% say their dog tires easily after minimal activity and 27% say their dog is less engaged or playful with their families.

"The results show that many owners of overweight dogs feel conflicted about what quality of life means for their pets," said Jason Gagné, DVM, DACVIM (Nutrition), Director of Veterinary

Communications for Pro Plan Veterinary Diets. "While owners recognize that excess weight is keeping their dogs from participating in activities they once enjoyed, they also worry their dogs will be unhappy if feeding changes are made."

### **What Can Owners Do?**

Many surveyed owners *have* tried to help using DIY slimming strategies but were met with limited success. According to the survey, the most common weight-loss approaches tried by owners are reducing portions of existing food, cutting back on treats and increasing exercise, yet 68% of owners who tried these strategies stated their dogs lost only a little weight or no weight at all.

"Understanding the significance of this issue is the first step towards a healthy future for our pets," said Gagné. "The second is working closely with your veterinarian to create a weight loss plan that will work for you AND your pet – including the right nutrition, which can make a big difference. Pro Plan and Pro Plan Veterinary Diets offer a range of formulas, like OM Metabolic Response + Joint Mobility, specifically designed to help pets lose body fat while maintaining lean muscle mass."

It's also important to think about weight before it becomes a problem. In a 14-year study published in 2002, Purina scientists were the first to show the importance of keeping dogs at an ideal body condition throughout their lives<sup>3</sup>. Researchers monitored the health of 48 Labrador Retrievers throughout their lives during which half the dogs were fed 25% less (restricted-fed) than their full-fed (control) siblings. The results showed that feeding dogs to an ideal body condition over a lifetime can significantly extend a dog's healthy years – by an average of 1.8 years for the dogs in the study.

If you have concerns about your pet's weight, talk to your veterinarian. To learn more about weight management support and Pro Plan Veterinary Diets, visit [proplanvetdirect.com](https://proplanvetdirect.com).

### **About Nestlé Purina PetCare**

Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations. Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Pro Plan, Pro Plan Veterinary Diets, Purina ONE, Dog Chow, Fancy Feast and Tidy Cats. Our more than 10,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. More than 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition. Purina promotes responsible pet care through our scientific research, our products and our support for pet-related organizations. Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than \$150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive. Purina is part of Nestlé, a global leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness. For more information, visit [purina.com](https://purina.com) or [subscribe here](#) to get the latest Purina news.

## **About the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)**

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2005 with the primary mission of preventing and treating pet obesity. APOP conducts research to substantiate pet obesity prevalence levels in the United States and offers resources and tools to veterinarians and pet parents to recognize, prevent, and treat pet obesity. For more information, visit [www.petobesityprevention.org](http://www.petobesityprevention.org).

<sup>1</sup> Data was collected by Relevation Research via an online survey from June 6-12, 2023. A total of 618 nationally representative dog owners qualified and completed the survey. Qualified participants were men and women aged 18 and older, owned one or more dogs (age 13 months or older), were household members most responsible for taking the dog(s) to a veterinarian, and had taken the dog(s) to a veterinarian in the past 12 months and identified their dog(s) as overweight.

<sup>2</sup> Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) Pet Obesity Prevalence Survey 2022

<sup>3</sup>Kealy, R.D., Lawler, D.F., Ballam, J.M., Mantz, S.L., Biery, D.N., Greeley, E.H., & Stowe, H.D. (2002). Effects of diet restriction on life span and age-related changes in dogs. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 220, 1315-1320.

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