

## WHY IS MY DOG OVERWEIGHT?

By Dr. Terri Hartung

You go to the vet, and they put Spot on the scale. Uh, not good. You realize that Spot's ribs have mysteriously vanished.... And the vet gives you "the look." You know the one. It's time for the lecture - and you're ready with your defense. (It's familiar to your vet, because she uses the same defense when she looks at her own dogs. I assure you vets are not immune!)

### ***"I'm just feeding the amount it says on the bag!"***

Reality check. *Everything* on that bag- the striking wolf/mountains/show dog photo, the intense colors, the gigantic letters screaming "GRAIN FREE. YOU ARE SCUM IF YOU FEED ANYTHING ELSE!" - is designed to sell you dog food. LOTS of dog food. Those label recommendations are for some non-existent, hyperactive, metabolically inefficient dog. They are NOT made a dog anyone actually owns, and certainly not for your dog. Save some money. Feed less.

### ***"He doesn't even eat all his food!"***

Well, if he doesn't eat it all, and he's still overweight, you're feeding too much for Fido's metabolism and amount of exercise. The only way to lose weight is to either eat less or exercise more. Sorry. (I hate this in my own life, too.)

### ***"All he eats is dry food!"***

You know, if you were going to try (perhaps for a strenuous hiking expedition) to pack the most calories into the smallest storage space possible, you'd create dry dog food. Think of it - no filler, no fiber, no water, just good healthy high protein and fat ingredients, packed into an efficient high calorie low volume kibble. (Canned food, largely water and blessedly overpriced, is much less likely to be overfed.)

### ***"She just eats a few treats a day!"***

Seriously, how big is Fluffy's stomach? For a toy dog, it might be the size of a half-dollar. Maybe 10 kibbles a day is a full ration for your Chihuahua. Maybe those two dog biscuits for a 6-lb dog are the equivalent of 20 cookies for a 150-lb person.

### ***"We cut back and he's still not losing weight!"***

Cutting the calories enough to *maintain* weight is hard. For a dog to *LOSE* weight, they must eat even less. It is cruel and unfair that some dogs (and people) gain weight on air. (Labs and beagles are especially "easy keepers." Unfortunately, this type of metabolism often coexists with a perpetually ravenous appetite - you CANNOT fill up a lab.) For these desert island survivor dogs, some type of diet/low cal dog food, perhaps with added raw veggies, may be the only way to provide the required nutrients within the limited calories that he can ingest. (On the other hand, a dog continuing to gain in spite of heroic efforts may indeed have a medical problem like hypothyroidism or Cushing's disease. It is worth discussing with your vet.)

### ***"We can't get her to exercise!"***

For those of you with porky small dogs, one effective weight loss plan is "Fetch the food." Forget the bowl. Toss each kibble individually down the hall and make them run for it. They get exercise. You get bored, which makes you far less likely to feed ANY extra!